

HAPPY TRAILS HORSEBACK RIDING

ALABAMA EXTENSION



Alabama 4-H Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program

Building Stable Relationships Through Time in the Saddle
For every Alabama 4-H rider, regardless of discipline or ability

Table of Contents

- 01 Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program Benefits
- 02 Program Divisions – Trail Miles and Saddle Time Clubs
- 03 Rules and Regulations
- 04 General Riding and Trail Safety Guidelines
- 05 4-H Saddle Time Club Log Sheet

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01 Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program Benefits

Building Stable Relationships

The Alabama 4-H Happy Trails Horseback Riding program is a state-level program designed for 4-H members to receive recognition for the time they spend in the saddle each year. The Alabama 4-H Horse Project includes youth involved in a wide variety of riding disciplines and activities, both within and beyond those offered through the State Horse Show. The Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program provides an opportunity for all 4-H Horse Project members, regardless of riding discipline, competitive involvement, or ability level, to be rewarded for simply riding their horse throughout the club year.

Two divisions are available for active enrolled 4-H Members to join. When participants join one of the two divisions, they will receive a 4-H Horseback Riding Program t-shirt. Both divisions are open to all active 4-H members ages 9 to 18 who love to spend time riding their horse or other equid. All 4-H Horse Project rules apply, including the helmet policy. Join one or both divisions to enhance your skills and increase your chances of winning! There is a \$25 enrollment fee for each division.

The Relationship Between Horses and Humans

The bond between people and horses is built on a working relationship that has served us well in many ways. For young riders, this relationship offers many

rewards, as horses are often described as being able to touch a human's soul, teach essential life skills, and help humans find inner strength and peace. Beyond the emotional rewards of a strong horse and human bond, interacting with horses can have physical effects. For example, simple actions like petting or brushing a horse can influence heart rate responses in both the human and the animal. Additionally, when a handler or rider maintains a positive attitude, they can often lead a horse through tasks with greater ease.

A positive relationship with humans is vital for a horse's welfare or a "good life." Research shows that horses seek human company to increase their relaxation, which improves their motivation to participate in activities such as riding and training. The "magic" of the horse-human bond is rooted in the horse's ability to read human signals. Horses are experts in sensing our emotions and physical reactions, often better than we are at sensing them ourselves. Horses can smell the difference between when a human is feeling fear or happiness. They can also remember if a person looked angry or happy hours after seeing them and will adjust their behavior accordingly. By staying positive and paying attention to a horse's subtle signals, we can create a safe and happy environment for both the horse and rider.

The Alabama 4-H Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program encourages youth riders to spend meaningful, consistent time with their horses to strengthen the partnership that is at the heart of the Alabama Horse Project. Whether riding for recreation, competition, or personal growth, each hour spent in the saddle helps build trust, communication, and confidence between horse and rider. By rewarding time devoted to riding, the program recognizes not only a rider's commitment, but also the value of developing a positive relationship that supports the wellbeing, enjoyment, and success of both horse and rider.



02 Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program Divisions

4-H Trail Miles Club

The 4-H Trail Miles Club division is geared toward trail riders and is designed to track the miles ridden by a member. This division requires participants to keep track of their trail rides (miles) on a GPS device or application of their choice. The participants will take screenshots or photos of their ride logged on GPS once completed and upload those photos in a secure Qualtrics form. This form can be found in the Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program event in 4HOnline for the corresponding club year. Participants have 10 months to record and report as many trail ride miles as possible. Awards are based on the total number of trail miles, regardless of the number of horses ridden. At the end of the program, members will be awarded based on total miles in both the Junior (9 to 13) and Senior (14-18) age divisions. 4-H Trail Miles Club awards are based in 10-mile increments. Each 10 miles that the participant completes and turns in by the due date will move them into a new level.

Levels

- Trail Scout: 10-mile club
- Trail Explorer: 20-mile club
- Trail Guide: 30-mile club
- Trail Ranger: 40 mile-club
- Trail Master: 50+ mile club.

There will also be an award for one overall Junior and one overall Senior that completes and turns in the most miles in the 10 months.

4-H Saddle Time Club

The Saddle Time Club division is an open ride division designed to track the hours ridden by a member. This division requires participants to keep track of their saddle time on an official record sheet to be turned in monthly to a secure Qualtrics form. The official Saddle Time Club record sheet can be found on page 5 of this manual. The Qualtrics form can be found in the Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program event in 4HOnline for the corresponding club year. Participants have 10 months to record and report as

many hours in the saddle as possible. Awards are based on time spent riding, regardless of the number of horses ridden. Hours can be earned taking lessons, practicing, or simply riding around in your own backyard. At the end of the program, members will be awarded based on total miles in both the Junior (9 to 13) and Senior (14-18) age divisions. The 4-H Saddle Time Club awards are based in 20-hour increments. Each 20 hours that the participant completes and turns in by the due date will move them into a new level.

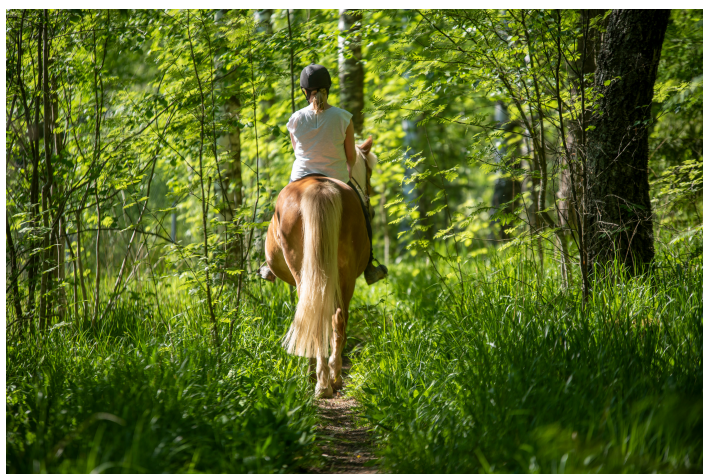
Levels

- Foundation Former: 20-40 hours
- Trust Builder: 40-60 hours
- Connection Creator: 60-80 hours
- Partnership Pioneer: 80-100 hours
- Master Horseman: 100+ hours

There will also be an award for one overall Junior and one overall Senior that completes and turns in the most hours in the 10 months.

Timeline

The Alabama 4-H Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program will run from August 1 through May 31 of the current club year. Registration will remain open in 4HOnline for the duration of August. Late registrations will not be accepted to ensure fairness and accuracy of reported miles and hours ridden.



03 Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program Rules and Regulations

1. Participation is limited to those members who are actively participating in the 4-H Horse Project and enrolled in 4HOnline. Alabama 4-H provides for 10 years of 4-H Club membership for youth ages 9 through 18.
2. All participants are expected to follow the 4-H Code of Conduct.
3. Youth should never ride alone. There should always be a parent/guardian, trainer, 4-H club leader, or other adult present.
4. The Liability Release Statement, which is part of the entry form, must be completed accurately.
5. The contest starts August 1 and goes until May 31 of each club year. All paperwork, record sheets, and GPS entries must be received before midnight on May 31 to be considered for awards.
6. Riders in both divisions are required to wear a properly fitted ASTM/SEI-approved equestrian helmet with a fastened chinstrap when mounted. Helmets must be properly sized to fit the 4-H member. Improperly sized helmets are a deterrent to safety. It is the responsibility of the member and parent or guardian to ensure that the headgear complies with appropriate safety standards for protective headgear intended for equestrian use, that is properly fitted and in good condition, and that it is worn while mounted.
7. It is the member and parent or guardian of the member's responsibility to ensure all horses ridden in this program are healthy and able to perform the tasks being asked of them. No abusive or inhumane treatment of an equine during this program will be tolerated. 4-H members and their guardians should routinely evaluate their animals using the Henneke Body Condition Score scale and closely monitor their health, nutritional intake, and water consumption. If a horse has a low body condition score or has health concerns, contact a veterinarian for treatment.
8. This program is open to all equids and breeds deemed healthy and capable of the riding conditions.
9. The Qualtrics link for both divisions will be distributed on August 1 and will close on May 31 through 4HOnline. You may enter as many Qualtrics forms as you have rides, or you may choose to enter all your rides each month in one form. No entries will be accepted after 11:59 pm central, May 31.
10. We encourage all participants in the program to also keep a record book using the Horse Record Book template on the Alabama 4-H webpage. This can be turned in for judging each year at the State 4-H Horse Judging and Hippology Contests. This can also be used to apply for Senior Achievement Awards.

Alabama 4-H makes no representation or warranty, expressed or implied, about any protective headgear and caution riders that death or serious injury may result despite wearing such headgear because all equestrian sports involve inherently dangerous risks, and no helmet can protect against all foreseeable injuries.



04 General Riding and Trail Safety Guidelines

Planning Ahead

The safety of both horse and rider is a top priority in the Alabama 4-H Horse Project. All participants of the Alabama 4-H Happy Trails Horseback Riding Program must follow safety guidelines, including the required use of approved riding helmets whenever mounted. Prioritizing safety helps reduce the risk of injury, promotes responsible decision-making, and creates a positive experience for both horse and rider. By participating in this program, members commit to putting safety first and serving as positive role models for others in the equine community.

Safety Guidelines

1. Always ride with a parent or friend. Never ride alone, especially on a trail. Junior aged youth (9 to 13) should always ride with a parent or guardian.
2. Always have a fully charged cell phone.
3. Make sure your horse is up to date on vaccinations, and have a current negative Coggins test and health papers with you.
4. Trail ride with a map of the area and a compass.
5. Stay on marked trails when trail riding.
6. Carry a flashlight, hoof pick, sunglasses, sunscreen, and bug spray.
7. Have both a human and horse first aid kit.
8. Bring snacks and water.
9. Tell someone not riding with you where you are going and what time you expect to be back.
10. Have some way to attach your contact information to your horse in the event you get separated.
11. Always check the weather before you ride. Being outdoors in storms and excessive heat can be deadly.
12. In hot weather, monitor your horse for heat stress (rapid breathing or insufficient

sweating). If you see signs of heat stress, immediately dismount, and find shade and cool down your horse. Call a veterinarian.

13. Dress appropriately for the type of riding you will be performing and the weather conditions. Be aware that summer storms can pop up quickly. Have rain gear just in case.
14. Check tack regularly to make sure it stays in working order and repair or replace any damaged or broken equipment.
15. Always wear proper footwear (boots with a heel) to help prevent your foot from slipping through the stirrups.
16. Know your own riding abilities. Use extreme caution when traversing rough or steep terrain and obstacles. Don't be afraid to dismount and walk.
17. Be a safe and courteous rider.



4-H Saddle Time Club Log Sheet

Name: _____ Age Division: _____

Date	Hours Ridden	Location	Type of Ride (Trail, Training, Pleasure, Lessons, etc.)	Comments (Successes, New Skills, Mood, Challenges, etc.)