

Newsletter



Spring Trails
Issue No. 17

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Greetings!

Welcome to the Spring Trails Edition of the NHHC Newsletter. We trust you will find the articles informative and helpful.

Don't forget our annual meeting is this Sunday 10:30-12:00 at the Common Man Restaurant in Concord, N.H. The agenda includes voting of 2010 officers, Board suggested changes to bylaws, ballots, and committee reports. We hope to see you then!

Sincerely,
Trish Morris, Secretary
NH Horse Council

Make Spring Trails Happy Trails!

Mud season is upon us. Please avoid trails during mud season.

What is mud season? "Mud season occurs in places where the ground freezes deeply in winter, is covered by snow, and thaws in spring. Dirt roads and trails become muddy because the deeply frozen ground thaws from the surface down as the air temperature warms above freezing. The visible ice and snow melts but the frozen lower layers of the ground prevent water from percolating into the soil and so the surface layers of the soil become saturated with water and turn to mud."

If the trails are clear of snow and ice but snow and ice is still visible along side of the trail it is best to avoid the trail. The melting snow, ice and early rainfall will saturate the surrounding soil.

Even after the snow and ice has disappeared the ground may still be frozen. The higher temperatures in April help warm the soils and get rid of the ground frost. But remember April Showers can produce a lot of rain contributing to saturating soils not yet fully thawed. Also, be aware that soils in higher elevations will take longer to dry out than trails at lower elevations. So at home or where you start out your ride may be dry but as you climb higher the trail may be too wet to ride. It is best to wait until all ground frost has melted and water can drain freely within the deep layers of soil and the soil has had a chance to dry.

Depending on weather patterns each year and where you live, mud season may start early in mid-March or last longer well into May. Please respect landowners' wishes and look for postings regarding any trail closings and openings for each year's mud season. If postings are not available use the guidelines shown above.

Mud season in March, April and sometimes May is a great time to get involved with Trail Maintenance before show or trail riding schedules begin. Get a group together (include 4H, Pony Club, Youth groups) and volunteer to help to clean up winter and storm debris on public trails that equestrians are allowed to ride. Make sure you get permission before you do any work, this also insures that you get recognition and develop a relationship with the owner or manager. You can also work with other user groups who do trail maintenance. Do all you can to promote equestrians on public trails and show we are an asset to public land use. Please let NHHHC know where you have helped or plan to help with Trail Maintenance so we can pass it along to others and to State agencies such as the Statewide Trails Advisory Committee.

DO TO THE WIND STORM AND RECENT FLOODING MOST TRAILS WILL BE IMPASSABLE BECAUSE OF DOWNED TREES AND EROSION.

State parks and public trails will need your help. As a reminder, trail maintenance is best done on human foot and with loppers that have long handles and can cut 3 inch diameter (or more) limbs or stems. Any cuttings should be removed from the trail to prevent tripping of other users and from this debris being washed away causing drainage problems.

NHHHC has a free document titled Simple Guidelines for Equestrian Trails (Riding Trails) and Consideration for Maintenance and Safety. This document includes explaining basic maintenance that anyone can do.

Trail Safety: Hidden Dangers

Beware of Tendon Tragedies due to soft grounds of Spring.

Finally, we are having an early spring this year. I cannot remember having open ground the month of March for the 25 years since I have lived in NH. What a treat if you are a horse owner/ equestrian, to be able to mount up and hit the trails to see what winter storms have left behind with out the annoyance of bugs. Unfortunately, after all the rain and snow melt, the ground quality may not be safe travel for your horse.

I took my mare out on my favorite frequented trail this past week, an old cart trail that has been in Brookline for as long as the town's conception (hard trodden by

wagons, heavy logging equipment, snowmobiles, and horses for years) only to find it a very concerning experience. I expected the trails to be wet, but I was not expecting the ground to give-way to the extent it did at all levels of elevation. My mare walked, sank into, ground she has covered for 8 years of which I have never experienced what we did that day. She is a lightweight mare of maybe 800#s. I had to dismount to walk to higher grounds, of which I was sinking into, next to her. Even the higher grounds were not exempt from these quicksand-like conditions.

If you are thinking of going out trail riding and cross-country-ing, I encourage you test the ground surfaces prior to heading out on horse back. If your foot sinks into the ground, consider holding off for a couple more days. Hidden by the usual leaves and mosses, the ground appears solid to the eye, but is very soft underneath, giving way by 6-8 inches to a horse's smaller hoof, but heavier weight per surface area, compared to our human foot. These kinds of conditions are very dangerous in regards to flexor tendon safety, joint impact and soft tissue wear. When the horses' leg sinks unexpectedly deep into the sod, **this can over extend their flexor tendons causing tendon strains, known as "bowed tendons"** - a diagnosis no one wants to hear when owning a horse. Tendon strains and ligament desmitis (ligament strains) can take 6 -12 months to heal properly, and some never do!

Please give the earth some time to harden up before subjecting your horse to this physical stress that could cause considerable tissue damage. These stresses travel all the way up the kinetic chain from the distal leg tendons, ligaments and joint cartilage surfaces, right on up to the higher musculature, causing the horse to suffer from proximal joint stiffness and delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) throughout the shoulder, neck and top line. Please consider your horse's well being this spring by making safe choices to prevent injuries.

When you do get out there next, please remember to warm up with at least a mile of walking to get your horse warmed up, prior to faster gaits on irregular surfaces.

Enjoy the sun! Ride safe.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Brooks, PT, MEd., CERP
Equine Physical Therapist

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Updates: Horses in Need

Just a quick update for all of you: Thanks to everyone who responded, forwarded along the email, passed the word around, offered assistance, advice and opened up their homes!

The Raymond horses at the bankrupt ranch: all of the horses and ponies found new homes.

Candia/Canterbury Arabians: are all excelling in their new homes. You may see a few in local show circuits this summer!

Many of you may have seen WMUR Wednesday night concerning the horses rescued by the NH SPCA/Police in Middleton. Check out their website (www.nhspca.org) for more information or email sbryant@nhspca.org. Their facilities are full and they are in need of help. The Middleton horses are currently under vet supervision and care due to the severity of their health concerns.