

## **So You Want Horses at Your Event An Autocrat's Guide**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this article is to familiarize you with what is needed in order to have horses at your event. You or your group may have heard that there is an equestrian program in the Kingdom and you think you might like to have horse activities at your event. Believe it or not, the equestrians would love to come to your event, but because of the nature of horses and SCA policies, having horses at an event takes a little more planning than just saying you'd like the equestrians to show up on a given day and time.

### **The Equestrian Year**

Horse people love to take their horses places and show them off to the populace. However, doing this can be quite expensive in terms of hauling costs. Most truck/trailers get less than 10 MPG- at this rate the cost of gas adds up in a hurry. To help make sure that no one month will break the bank for our equestrian community, the Equestrian community has informally agreed to limit the number of equestrian events to once a month. Two or more may take place in any given month if they are on different sides of the Kingdom or are specialized local events such as demos or clinics.

The equestrian community starts planning its calendar by Twelfth-Night and has it formalized by Ice Dragon. If you know in advance that you would like to hold an equestrian event, please contact the Kingdom Equestrian Marshal to get your group's event on the calendar. If you find out after the calendar has been approved that you would like to hold an equestrian event, please e-mail the Kingdom Equestrian Marshal to see if your date and location will work.

For most of the Kingdom, the active season is from mid-May through October. If you live significantly south of I-80 or have access to an indoor arena, the season can be extended from late April to the first week of November.

## **What to Look for in a Site**

Once you have a date selected, the next step is to find a site that will work for both your event and for the horses. The easiest way to do this is to find a site that has horse facilities in place. If you are lucky enough to find such a site, inquire when their normal operating season is. Site conditions change over the course of the year, and if you find a site that has horse facilities but only uses them from June to August, there is a good chance you will not want to use it in April or October. Sites that have indoor and outdoor arenas and operate year round are the gold standard, but can be difficult to find or cost too much to rent, but occasionally you can find such a site for a reasonable fee.

Sites that have horse arenas are preferred, but if this is not the case, the site must have at least one large, flat, well drained field in which to set up an arena for the horses. Approximate dimensions should be no narrower than 75 feet and at least 170 feet long. The field must be inspected for and be free of holes, debris, furrows and other objects that could trap a horse's leg or wedge themselves in to a horse's hoof. Careful inspection is essential. Holes must be filled and marked and debris must be removed prior to the horses coming on site. The arena and or riding area must be clearly marked by a boundary rope or fence, so please plan ahead for this type of expenditure.

Horses need water, so the site must have a source of clean, potable water close (within 100 feet) to where you are going to run the equestrian portion of your event. Depending on the weather and the number of contests run, a horse may go through several buckets of water during an event. Horses also get sprayed or sponged down in hot weather to help them cool down, so access to water is a must.

You will also have to provide a space for the hauling vehicles and trailers. This space must be able to support heavy trailers (weighing two tons and possibly more) even in soggy conditions. Room must also be available for the trailers to turn around. Think about a huge camping trailer and you will get the idea. Please make sure that the trailers can get in to your site. Low trees and entrance gates tend to be the "un-noticed" barriers that cause problems for horse trailers. A minimum clearance space of 8 feet wide and 10 feet tall will accommodate most trailers.

Stalls for the horses are always appreciated. Avoid standing stalls and look for a site with box stalls. If your site does not have stalls you will have to increase the amount of room in the trailer parking area so that the equestrians can set up temporary paddocks for weekend length events or trailer-tie their horses for a day event. A shaded area is nice for this purpose, but not at the expense of a soggy base for the trailers.

Equestrians also need to be near their horses as it is Kingdom policy that horses not be left unattended if housed in temporary facilities. Please keep this in mind when laying out your event; the Equestrians will also want to participate in the other event activities and spectators should not have to go very far to see the Equestrian activities.

If you are planning a multi-day event you will need to provide camping space adjacent to the paddock/stall areas. Horse owners need to be close by so they can monitor their horses. If you are lucky enough to find a site that provides supervised boarding then this requirement can be skipped.

Once you have located your site it is always a good idea to get an equestrian marshal to come and inspect it before you sign a contract. The equestrian marshal community has been trained to inspect sites and determine if the site can accommodate our activities. If the riders know that an authorized equestrian marshal has inspected the facility/property, you will increase your chances that more than a few horses and riders will show-up to your event. Please do not hesitate to ask for help.

### **Getting the Site Owner to Say Yes**

Once you have located a possible site the next step is to convince the site owner to allow you to use the site to do medieval horse games. In my experience this is best done by explaining exactly what it is you are planning on doing and then informing the site owner that free (to the owner) insurance will be provided by the SCA. It helps if you have an equestrian marshal along to help explain the horse activities, but most people can do this on their own.

Medieval (SCA) equestrian activities are not the norm in the equestrian world. Site owners will need you to explain to them what it is you are planning on doing. Many of them will automatically assume you are going to hold a joust. Often, the very mention of jousting can cause a strong reaction with most horse facilities owners. If you are planning on holding non-equestrian activities they will need to know this as well. Explain in detail what it is you are planning on doing. Do not gloss over things like fighting, archery or fencing, especially if you are renting a working equestrian facility. The owners need to know what you are doing so they can make an informed decision and explain what is happening on that day or days to their clients. Be sure to mention that the SCA provides equestrian liability insurance. The coverage is a \$1,000,000 per incident \$2,000,000 dollar aggregate policy and is provided to the site owner free of charge. The SCA requires that this policy be activated for all official equestrian activities, including demos, parades and practices.

If the site owner needs additional information about equestrian activities have them speak with an equestrian marshal. If you do not have access to a local marshal, the KEO or DKEO are good resources. If you need their help, please make sure to provide them with a contact name, facility name, reason why they are calling and times to call the site owner.

When and if the site owner agrees to your event proposal, be sure to find out what he/she will need in the way of vaccinations and other tests for a horse to enter their facility. Also find out if stallions are allowed on site. Stallions often need special considerations and potentially can cause problems, so please find out in advance if stallions are allowed.

## **You Have a Site- Now What?**

There are a few things you will need to do when planning an Equestrian event that are not standard procedures for regular events. The first thing you will want to do is get an equestrian marshal. The equestrian marshal is the person who will be responsible for all equestrian activities at your event. They have to be on site to inspect health papers (horses cannot be unloaded until their papers are checked) as well as set up and supervise games and processions. Choose your EqMiC (Equestrian Marshal in Charge) wisely; you will be working side by side and will have to consult with him/her early and often. If anything goes wrong at the event with the horses this is the person that will be responsible. Working with and her/him and keeping up a constant line of communications will help you, the autocrat, avoid a lot of problems while locking the equestrian marshal out of the decision-making process will only lead to trouble. The EqMiC is the responsible person for your event's equestrian portion, make use of this resource. And please remember, when it comes to things equestrian at your event, the EqMiC's word is law.

Chances are that the equestrian marshal will need assistance, so you will need people to assist with things like setting-up the arena, scoring the games, and tear-down. Be sure to check with the equestrian marshal about what you will need in the way of signage and waiver forms. Each state has their own signage requirements; the equestrian marshal will be able to tell what you will need and how it needs to be posted. She/he should also be able to help you with acquiring insurance. You will also want a back-up equestrian marshal in case the first one is unable to attend the event due to an emergency. Your best bet when finding a back-up marshal is to make sure your back-up is not from the same family or that the two marshals share horse facilities (farm emergencies can involve everyone that uses the facility).

Insurance is mandatory. Equestrian insurance costs \$50.00 for an event. (This fee covers both one day and multi-day events.) If the site owner wants to be specifically named on the insurance then an additional \$50.00 will be needed to cover this expense. The insurance certificate will be mailed directly to the site owner. Check with the SCA insurance office and the site owner to see if the insurance certificate has been mailed and received. Do not order the insurance until your site has been approved by an equestrian marshal and please inform the marshal that you are going to order the insurance or that you want him/her to order it for you. This will avoid confusion and problems later down the road. Insurance must be ordered a minimum of 30 days prior to the event and 45 days prior to the event is better. There is a \$100 late fee for insurance requests submitted after 30 days.

Because of insurance costs and other Equestrian expenses, you will want to get the most out of your Equestrian investment. Be sure to plan activities/games with your equestrian marshal. In all likelihood equestrians will not show up if you are planning on having the horses attend just to stand around and look pretty. Processions are okay, but you will get a better attendance if you combine them with games. You will need equipment to hold the games, but if you ask, most marshals and riders will be more than willing to bring equipment with them to help out.

You will need to find a local large animal vet who is willing to be on-call for the duration of the event. This is a requirement. If a horse gets sick or injured getting a vet on-site immediately can make the difference between a minor complaint and a dead horse. Horses are big strong animals, but they can be taken down by the slightest of things. Having a vet show up in a timely manner can prevent all sorts of terrible things from happening.

Having a Farrier on call, while not a requirement, is an added bonus your guests will appreciate. If a horse throws a shoe, it is done for the day. Having a Farrier on call can make or break an event, especially if it is a multi-day event.

It is also nice, but not required, if you can find a source of good quality hay for the event. If you are unable to do so, do not worry, just notify the equestrians in advance that they need to bring their own feed and hay.

### **The Event Announcement**

Your event announcement will have to have some additional information. Be sure to include vaccination and Coggins test requirements (check with the site owner for these or if there is no site owner your equestrian marshal). If there are other restrictions or requirements, make sure to add them as well. Additional fees for boarding and hay should also be included. If your site owner has requirements for boarding and stall cleaning these should also be in your announcement.

You will need to list when the equestrian marshal will be on site for unloading. There is nothing worse than showing up to a site only to find out that you need to keep your horses on the trailer for an hour or more because the Equestrian marshal is not there to inspect the paperwork. (Only the Equestrian marshal in charge is allowed to do this so plan accordingly).

Be sure to list the planned equestrian activities. If you are planning non-standard games this should also be in the announcement along with where the additional rules can be found.

Directions can be a bit of a problem as well. What works for a passenger car may not work so well for a driver and a trailer full of horses. If you are renting an established horse facility ask the owner for the best way to get to their facility; Most of the time the directions will be the same. Things like steep hills and sharp bends in the road should be avoided if at all possible. Otherwise please warn the drivers about potential problems with the route, especially if you think they may be arriving after dark. You may want to check the proposed route in with your equestrian marshal to see if there might be problems.

## **The Equestrian Event Checklist**

Now that you know what goes into planning an equestrian event, you probably don't need to read through all that again so here's the unofficial checklist:

### **\*Early in the Calendar Year**

1. Contact the KEO to get your event on the Equestrian Calendar sometime between Twelfth Night and Ice Dragon. The sooner the better.

### **\*Four Months Out**

1. Find a site.
2. Find an equestrian marshal you can work with. (Find a back-up marshal as well)
3. Have the equestrian marshal inspect your site – change the site if there are concerns.

### **\*Three Months Out**

1. Plan the equestrian portion of the event with your equestrian marshal
2. If you need equestrian games equipment for your event ask around to borrow some or build your own.
3. Write up an event announcement – make sure to include the particulars for the equestrian portion.
4. Order the equestrian insurance.

### **\*Two Months Out**

1. Check to see if the insurance is in the possession of the site owner.
2. If the insurance policy hasn't come contact the SCA Insurance Office and have them re-send it.
3. Find a Vet to be on-call
4. Find a Ferrier to be on-call

### **\*One Month Out**

1. Check the SCA Equestrian Site ( [sca.org](http://sca.org)) to see if there are any changes in rules or waiver policies. (It happens)
2. Make-up signage appropriate for your state's and the SCA's requirements.
3. Remind your back-up Marshal that they are on-call if something happens to your EqMiC.

**\*One Week Out**

1. Check with your EqMiC and make sure they are coming otherwise inform you back-up marshal they are it. (If there are problems with the back-up marshal call the KEO to get an EqMiC.)

**\*The Day before the Event**

1. Set-up your facilities and post your signs.

**\*The Day of the Event**

1. Have fun at your event.