Mounted Paper Chase

Organizer's Guide & Checklist

A team trail-following event built around good horsemanship

An adventure, not a race | All disciplines welcome

PLAN YOUR EVENT

A mounted paper chase can work in a few fields, a network of trails, or a reserved equestrian park. Pairs or small teams follow a removable trail, make a few decisions, and arrive together. There is no race and no reward for speed.

Host barn / club: _____ **Event date:** _____

Location / permit contact: _____

Event director / phone: _____ **Est. teams:** _____

First departure: _____ **Last expected return:** _____

Briefing location / time: _____

SELECT A WORKABLE FORMAT

- ☐ Small property: use safe turns and a few decision points; prevent crossing traffic and restrict the number of teams on the course.
- ☐ Longer trail system: use recognizable boundaries, a clear course map, and accessible emergency entry points.
- ☐ Borrowed or rented site: confirm park or landowner permission, insurance requirements, event rules, parking, marking permissions, and shared-use trail restrictions.
- ☐ Invited barns: provide advance entry details, rider suitability criteria, emergency procedures, trailer parking, and horse health documentation required by the venue.

THREE PRINCIPLES TO PROTECT

HORSE FIRST

Fitness, temperament, footing and comfort determine the course and pace.

STAY TOGETHER

Two to four riders per team, with at least one experienced rider.

FINISH TOGETHER

Everyone who completes the route receives recognition; no placings for speed.

Course & Trail Design

Where the decisions make the adventure

INSPECT BEFORE YOU MARK

- [ ] Confirm land access and any limits on tied markers, signs, horses, speed, gates, and trail use.
- [ ] Ride or walk the complete route; inspect holes, footing, low limbs, wire, livestock, water, shared-use crossings and escape routes.
- [ ] Check daylight, forecast, hunting activity and other park users; define conditions for delay or cancellation.
- [ ] Create a complete organizer-only map showing route, false leads, checkpoints, boundaries and emergency access points.

EXAMPLE TRAIL-MARKING KEY

YELLOW
Follow this route

GREEN ARROW
Direction at a turn

RED X
False lead: turn back

Use one consistent local system and explain it during the briefing. The trail markers stay in place; remove every marker after the event. Tie them securely, away from horses' mouths and out of other trail users' way.

CREATE DECISIONS, NOT DANGER

- Fork: two plausible directions. The wrong branch ends safely with a clear 'Turn Back' symbol.
- False lead: a short marked detour that never approaches a hazard or exits the approved riding area.
- Missing trail: pause the markers briefly in an obvious, bounded search area.
- Hidden turn: the correct route changes direction; riders must look carefully, not travel fast.

Good first-event target: two or three decision points, all approachable at a walk. Avoid repeated head-on crossings or routes that tempt riders to cut through a fence line, road or unknown footing.

OPTIONAL CHECKPOINTS

Post an ordered series of large symbols or numbers. Teams can memorize the sequence, take photos while halted, or use a checkpoint card. No reaching, grabbing markers or dismounting is required. Provide an alternative for anyone without a phone.

- [ ] Have a second person test-ride the marked route as a newcomer; adjust any confusing or unsafe spots.
- [ ] Make a route-removal plan and assign a named person to collect signs and flagging.

Teams, Staff & Supplies

Adaptable to Western, hunt seat, dressage and trail riders

SUGGESTED DIVISIONS

Walk	Short route; simple decisions; all ages where ability and suitable supervision allow.
Novice	Short-to-medium route; walk with optional trot only in designated areas.
Open	Longer or trickier route; optional canter only on preapproved sections.
Mixed / family	Any discipline and mixed experience; pace of the least confident horse or rider.

Assign horses and teammates deliberately. Each team needs an experienced rider; do not use this event to introduce a genuinely green or highly reactive horse to unfamiliar terrain. A certified, properly fitted helmet and appropriate footwear are recommended event requirements for every rider.

STAFFING - ASSIGN NAMES

Event director / emergency lead	Coordinates changes and response	Name: _____
Hare / course marker	Lays and inspects route	Name: _____
Starter / roster recorder	Briefs teams; logs departure	Name: _____
Finish recorder	Checks each team and checkpoint sequence	Name: _____
On-call course helper	Can reach a rider or horse in trouble	Name: _____
Trail cleanup	Collects every marker and sign	Name: _____

SUGGESTED SUPPLIES

- ☐ Removable, visible trail flagging
- ☐ Turn Back signs and direction arrows
- ☐ Numbered / pictured checkpoint signs
- ☐ Organizer route map and extra markers
- ☐ Tools / bags for marker collection
- ☐ Team start-and-return log
- ☐ Charged phone / radio and backup plan
- ☐ First-aid kit and emergency contacts
- ☐ Drinking water for horses and people
- ☐ Helmets, tack and horse checks
- ☐ Certificates, snacks, cider / cocoa
- ☐ Trash bags, table and optional decor

Event Preparation & Safety

Use this page as the day-of-event master checklist

BEFORE EVENT DAY

- ☐ Confirm venue use, insurance and any participant paperwork; circulate entry and division details.
- ☐ Assign teams, confirm horse/rider suitability, and plan the departure interval (often 5-10 minutes; adjust for course visibility).
- ☐ Set start cutoff, latest expected return, maximum teams on course, and procedure for missing / overdue teams.
- ☐ Arrange horse parking / ties or supervised finish area; determine refreshments and horse care order.

ON THE DAY

- ☐ Recheck weather, footing and route; close hazardous sections and cancel if needed.
- ☐ Set the course; test markers, false leads and all checkpoints from horseback.
- ☐ Inspect tack and helmets; check horse condition and participant readiness.
- ☐ Brief every rider (mounted or unmounted - organizer's choice) and confirm emergency contacts.
- ☐ Log every team out and back; close the course only when all riders and horses are accounted for.
- ☐ Remove markers, inspect for litter, record any incidents, and return the property in good order.

COMPLETE EMERGENCY INFORMATION

Emergency caller / phone: _____

911 access point / gate / road: _____

Nearest address / coordinates: _____

Backup if phone service fails: _____

On-site first aider / kit location: _____

Equine veterinarian / number: _____

Bad weather / loose horse stop plan: _____

Emergency basics: If a rider falls, the team halts and raises the alarm. Call 911 for serious injury, altered responsiveness, breathing difficulty, major bleeding or suspected head/neck/spinal injury. Do not move a person with suspected spine injury except for immediate safety or lifesaving care; trained responders direct care. Do not chase a loose horse. A panicked horse, unknown hazard or missing trail is a reason to stop and contact the organizer, never to press on.

Safety reference points: United States Pony Clubs, 2026 Safety Handbook and 10 Tips to Avoid Trail Troubles (2026); American Red Cross, Head, Neck, and Spinal Injury and First Aid Steps.

Team Start & Return Log

Photocopy as needed; every horse and rider must be accounted for

Event: _____ **Date:** _____

Starter / phone: _____ **Return cutoff:** _____

Team	Division	Riders / horses	Lead rider	Out	Back	OK?
1						☐
2						☐
3						☐
4						☐
5						☐
6						☐
7						☐
8						☐
9						☐
10						☐
11						☐

☐ All teams checked in; every horse and rider accounted for.

☐ All markers and checkpoint signs retrieved; venue cleared.

Final sign-off / time: _____