AERC RIDE MANAGER'S HANDBOOK

Revised January 2008

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INTRODUCTION

Endurance rides are sanctioned by the American Endurance Ride Conference. To qualify for sanctioning, an endurance ride must meet certain standards, described in the AERC rule book and this handbook. These standards include being at least 50 miles in length per day, up to 155 miles in three days, run under specific veterinary controls, and being open to all equines. Multi-day rides or Pioneer rides, often using historic trails, are 155 miles in three days, or greater, and require special sanctioning approval by the Board of Directors (BOD). If these rides have taken place successfully without negative incident for two consecutive years, sanctioning can thereafter be approved directly by the regional sanctioning director.

In organizing a ride, you must provide: equal opportunities, equal treatment and equal judgment to all competitors. This includes not only the veterinary supervision but also the management of the entire event.

Managing an endurance ride can be both gratifying and frustrating! But it's a great way for a rider to give back to the sport and for a non-riding horse lover to promote this wholesome sport. This handbook will help both the first-time and the experienced Ride Managers (RM) to produce a successful ride. Please read it carefully and be certain to read the AERC Rules, as it is essential that they govern your ride at all times.

WHAT IS THE AERC?

The American Endurance Ride Conference (AERC) was founded in 1972 as a sanctioning body for distance events and record-keeping organization for riders and their horses competing in distance events. AERC currently has both Senior and Junior divisions. Junior riders are under 16 years of age as of December 1st of the current riding year and usually must ride with an adult sponsor (age 21 or over). Exceptions are explained in the AERC rules. Senior riders are divided into four weight divisions: Featherweight (up to 160 pounds), Lightweight (161-185 pounds), Middleweight (186-210 pounds) and Heavyweight (211 pounds and over). These weights include all tack. AERC members declare their weight division at the beginning of the ride year and may submit a change in division up to June 1 of the ride season. No changes are accepted after June 1.

Each member of AERC has a rider ID number by which he is identified in all AERC records. A non-member must pay a $15 non-member fee (it could be called a one-day membership fee) when he/she enters your ride. As a ride manager, you must be certain that each rider has a valid number, unless he/she declares to be a non-member. If a rider gives you a non-valid number, you will be responsible for either collecting the non-member fee from the rider or pay it yourself out of ride funds. The AERC office will be happy to verify any membership number given you by an entering rider if you have any reason to suspect the number is invalid (as in the case of a lapsed membership).

After a rider has completed 250 miles of endurance rides, he/she will receive a rider patch and a chevron. Chevrons are awarded in 250-mile increments until 1,000 miles are attained. After 1,000 miles, the chevrons are awarded in 1,000-mile increments.

Members are asked to register their equine with AERC before the equine begins competition. Each equine will receive an identifying number that must be used when entering a ride in order to ensure the proper mount receives the mileage and bonus credits. Horse names are often difficult to read and riders may use "stable" names; using the equine ID number lessens the chance of error. Equines receive medallions upon completion of 1,000 miles of sanctioned rides and for each additional 1,000 miles.

The AERC has a variety of year-end awards, both national and regional. Further information is available from the AERC office, P.O. Box 6027, Auburn, CA 95604; phone: 530-823-2260 or toll-free 866-271-2372; fax: 530-823-7805; e-mail: aerc@foothill.net; website: www.aerc.org.

WHAT IS AN ENDURANCE RIDE?

An endurance ride can best be described as a cross-country contest of 50 or more miles. It is an equestrian athletic event with the same equine and rider covering a measured course within a specified maximum time. It is controlled by equine veterinarians who monitor the equines before, during and after the competition. There will be one or more veterinary checkpoints during a 50-mile ride, typically one at a midway point for a one-day leg of a multi-day ride and two to three or more for a one-day standalone event. Equines must be at least 60 months of age to compete in an endurance ride.

Pulse recovery is an important indicator of physical condition in both athletic humans and equines. The ride veterinarians will set the pulse criteria and announce it before the start of the ride. The equines are also monitored for other physical responses including lameness. Those not meeting the parameters are disqualified. The first equine across the finish line and judged in satisfactory physical condition ("fit to continue") is the overall winner. To protect the equines and to ensure fairness of competition, equines must not be influenced by any drug, medication or veterinary treatment.

Hereafter, the word "horse" is to be understood as any breed of equine—horse, mule, pony, donkey, or even a zebra, should anyone choose to ride one, and is interchangeable with the word "equine."

Some breed associations automatically endorse, for their own performance programs, a ride sanctioned by the AERC. These may include the International Arabian Horse Association, the Appaloosa Horse Club, the American Morgan Horse Association, and the Pony of the Americas.

Because horse and rider records and awards are based on the results of AERC sanctioned rides, it is absolutely necessary to put on endurance rides conforming to the AERC rules. The suggestions and standards set forth in this booklet will help you do this.

Endurance Ride Variations

One-Day Rides. Endurance rides are a minimum of 50 miles (12 hour maximum time for completion, including vet checks), and more 50 milers are sanctioned than any other distance. However, there is a large variety of rides and combination of rides available. Probably the most popular longer distance is the one-day 100 mile (24 hour maximum time for completion, including vet checks). The AERC rules allow any distance from 50 to 150 miles under the same ride name. You can, for example, have a 50, a 70, and a 100-mile ride all in one day or up to 155 miles in three days. You could even have up to 150 miles in two days.

The time allowed is incremental based on adding one hour and 15 minutes for every five additional miles over 50. Thus a 55-mile ride is allowed 13 hours 15 minutes, a 60-mile ride—14 hours 30 minutes, etc.

Elevator Rides. If your ride is sanctioned for several mileages, i.e., 30, 50, and 70, and the trail layout allows, you can offer the option to elevate from a lesser distance to a greater one. You must, however, sanction and advertise your ride as an elevator. A rider may elevate only from a shorter distance to a longer one, may elevate only once, and is awarded a completion only with no placing. Upon elevating, the rider is no longer considered to be a starter or a finisher in the shorter ride. If by chance the rider's horse is pulled, no miles or points are credited.

There are no restrictions for riders with horses of 60 or more months of age who opt to elevate from a limited distance (LD) ride to an endurance ride. A rider with a horse under 60 months of age may not elevate out of the LD category.

Two-Day Rides. A variation of the one-day 100 mile ride is a two-day 100 mile ride. Riders enter and complete 50 miles the first day; their horses stand a pre-ride vet check on Day 2, and must finish both days to earn completion credit. In the fall and winter when days are shorter, this prevents riders from being out on the trail in many hours of darkness. The same loop can be used the second day, but it is much more interesting if there are two different loops. Do remember that riders must complete the 50 miles in 12 hours each day. If each leg of the event is greater than 50 miles, i.e. a two-day 120-mile ride, each daily mileage is allowed the proportionate amount of time. Mileage must be in five-mile increments.

Multi-Day Rides. Becoming increasingly popular are the multi-day rides, often using historic trails. These rides are usually 50 to 55 miles a day. Trails are often point-to-point, with the ride camp in a different location each night. A rider may enter and ride one day, all days, or any combination in between. They may use one horse or several. Each day is a separate ride and is awarded a completion and best condition (BC) on its own merits. Some riders opt to ride all the days on the same horse. When this takes place, typically there is a special award for overall first place, and it is from these horses that an overall BC is chosen. Bear in mind that an overall first or BC may be won without the horse ever having placed in the top ten. Horses who have placed first or top ten in any of the individual days may not receive this award if they have not done the entire number of days. Ultimately, it is the horse and rider team that completes the entire number of days in the least amount of elapsed time that wins the overall first place. Overall BC is usually dependent on the judgment of the vet(s), as it is more difficult to judge by the AERC formula than in a one-day ride.

Point-to-point rides present the most difficult logistics, and riders must have crew drivers while they ride. Base camp rides, where rigs stay parked in the same camp for the entire event, are much easier for all, riders and management alike. Although each day's ride uses a different scenic trail, this format lacks the feeling of continuity and historical significance that is so pronounced on the point-to-point rides.

Multi-day rides require special sanctioning through the Special Event sanctioning director and must be approved by the BOD for the first two years (see Introduction).

AERC Limited Distance Rides

AERC has a limited distance (LD) program with rides of 25 to 35 miles in length. These rides must be sanctioned in conjunction with a regular endurance ride. Riders who are AERC members receive mileage credit for themselves and their horses in the separate LD category. Equines must be a minimum of 48 months of age to participate. Refer to the AERC Rules and Regulations for complete rules on LD.

Placements are given based on the order in which the horses meet a heart rate of 60 beats per minute. This means there is no "finish line." Riders return to camp as for a vet check and their finishing time is recorded as the time when a post-ride exam is requested. Then the horse must pass all the set criteria. If the horse fails to pass any portion of the set criteria, he is disqualified and receives no completion. All who pass criteria and earn a completion receive an award with emphasis on "to finish is to win." There may be a best condition award given. At this time, limited distance best condition varies greatly from region to region in the way it is determined. However, only those judged using the AERC best condition system are recognized by the AERC and count toward the Limited Distance Regional Best Condition standings.

These rides are not restricted to "novices" only, but are open to everyone. Horses that are young or not in condition and are raced for short distances can be subject to more metabolic stress than fit endurance ride competitors. Therefore, strict veterinary controls need to be set down by the head veterinarian and ride management if overstress injury or death of horses is to be prevented.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Planning and producing an endurance ride takes time, effort, and usually an upfront financial outlay. Few people are able to put on an endurance ride without a substantial number of competitors to defray the expenses in insurance, sanctioning fees, veterinary control, and facilities.

If you are considering sanctioning a ride in a location used for other endurance or competitive trail rides, the selection and measuring of the trail is far less time consuming than starting from scratch. In many parts of the country the trails are used in different combinations and events. One problem of familiarity with the trail is that it may be possible for riders to utilize shortcuts. Therefore, you may need to place spotters in a well-known area to be certain that all competitors ride the correct trail.

Like any sports activity involving numbers of people and held outdoors, a great deal of effort and planning is required to assure the event runs without serious problems. A generalized timetable of things to do months ahead and hours before the ride may be useful as a checkoff list (see Appendix A). In areas subject to severe winters, the trail must be located in the fall for an early spring ride. Snow and mud can prevent access to areas or dramatically change the contours of the land. Therefore, any timetable must be flexible.

AERC Sanctioning Requirements

You can obtain a sanctioning form (See Appendix B) from the AERC office or from your regional Sanctioning Director. The AERC has divided the United States and Canada into nine regions, each with its own Sanctioning Director to oversee the scheduling of endurance rides within its region. This includes resolving conflicts of date and location.

Spreading out regional rides may increase participation at your ride. Your regional sanctioning director must receive a request for sanctioning 120 days before the event is to take place. Regional directors may also be able to offer suggestions on ride personnel and veterinarians, as well as other useful information to help your ride run smoothly. They can also put you in touch with experienced Ride Managers in your area to help answer your questions and offer suggestions.

The sanctioning form must be filled out entirely, including the name of your head veterinarian, ride manager and assistant or alternate ride manager. These managers must be AERC members and must have some familiarity with endurance riding and basic management techniques.

After your ride is sanctioned, the AERC office will send you a Ride Manager's packet about one month before your ride. Look through it carefully, as there are post-ride forms that your head vet must fill out and other important information pertaining to your ride. Any changes you may wish to make to your ride must be recorded on a Ride Change Request (see Appendix B) at least 120 days before the event and submitted to your sanctioning director for approval. The director will then send it to the AERC office at least 90 days before the event.

PHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Choosing a Ride Campsite

The campsite needs to be spacious enough to hold all the expected trucks, trailers and campers. It needs to be accessible to motor homes and large trailer rigs, and it must be feasible to get rigs out after an unexpected rainstorm.

While people can bring their own drinking water, a source of water for the horses is imperative. If the source is difficult or unsafe for horses to access, provide a pump and stock trough and keep it full. If a campsite is to be dry, or if water is unfit for people, be sure to advise so in your ride flyer.

Mark off areas for the vet check, for ride personnel camping, and for vendors, if any. This will prevent any competitors from parking there and will eliminate the job of trying to move someone after they have already set up their corrals. Ride vets will probably prefer to camp in their own area, so they can meet and discuss logistics amongst themselves.

Unless the ride takes place in the wilderness, such as far out on the desert, you must provide sanitary facilities. A general rule is one outhouse per 25 people for a weekend. Have a supply of extra toilet paper available.

Advise in your flyer if the campsite will be cold or windy, so that riders will come prepared with extra clothing, bedding, and horse blankets. Advise also if there will be biting insects, snakes, or other wildlife for which riders will want to prepare. In summer, hot sun shining on gravel or asphalt all day radiates heat long after the sun has set, so consider locating a mid-summer campsite so it does not face west.

A bulletin board in camp is useful for posting a large map of the trail and various announcements, such as advising of fire danger; reminding people to keep dogs on leash, if that is your rule; a schedule of events, such as pre-ride vet check hours; dinner time; starting time for each event, if there are more than one; and whether or not the riders and crews must clean up camp after themselves. Some public areas require all hay and manure to be removed. If the campsite is on private land and the owner doesn't require the manure to be removed, it is at least beneficial to the land to scatter leftover hay so it does not burn the grass underneath it.

A pleasant campsite and good food will entice the competitors to stay for the awards presentation. Showers are a luxury, not a necessity, but riders do appreciate them.

Establishing the Trail

The nucleus of any endurance ride is the trail. The most important criterion for any trail is that it ***be the correct distance*** and that it be feasible and avoid obvious dangers. A ride may seem feasible on paper but may be impossible or excessively difficult in reality. Establishing the trail, which includes selecting a ride campsite and locations of out-of-camp vet checks can take months. The trail should be challenging and of interest to all entrants. Your ride may have some new riders with horses of limited trail experience, as well as some junior riders. Some of the most scenic trails cover rugged and remote terrain. Any sections that are naturally risky should be well marked and discussed in advance at the pre-ride briefing. Endurance riding is challenging enough without exposing horses and riders to unnecessary perils or adding hazards just to make the ride more difficult.

No matter how well you have planned, weather can cause things to go awry. Dry forests can be closed at the last minute due to fire danger and excessive rain can turn the ground into a sea of mud or even prevent a ride manager from opening the trails after winter damage. Public agencies may close parks or other areas if conditions are not suitable. Early snow masks lime or dolomite markings and may blend in with light color flagging.

Permission to Use Land

It is essential to obtain permission from landowners, whether it be private or under city, county, state or federal control. Public land is not always available for competitive events where an entry fee is charged. Most agencies will have a permit form for ride management to fill out. They will usually ask for a map of the complete trail and location of the ride camp and vet checks. They will also require proof of liability insurance and a special use fee before issuing a permit. Start this paperwork well before the ride, allowing time to change your route if they deny your request. Get permission in writing from private property owners and be certain they understand your intentions before they sign. This should include the various entities that will be passing through their land and the frequency: horses, motor vehicles, etc., what gates will be opened and for how long, who will open and close them, and trail restoration needs, before and after the ride.

Trail Layout

Many different trail configurations are used for endurance rides. Some are point-to-point, where the finish line is a long way from the start. This kind of trail, while often interesting and frequently of significant historic value, is by far the most difficult logistically for both ride management and riders. These usually require more ride personnel to run efficiently. The terrain covered and access to the trail are factors that must be considered. Other types of trail are: a single loop (sometimes with a "stem" in and out of base camp, making a "keyhole" shape), a single loop repeated (such as a 25-mile loop run twice to make 50 miles), a figure 8 (which allows the major vet check to be in camp) or a daisy pattern (which allows all vet checks to be in camp). The last one is the most logistically convenient, but can cause horses to become reluctant to leave camp.

Know the terrain before you plan your ride. If you don't have personal knowledge, check with people who do. Discover what conflicting activities may be taking place in the same area at the same time. These could include anything from cross-country bicycle races to cattle drives and would be seriously incompatible with an endurance ride.

Plan your vet checks with these factors in mind: availability of level space, water (either natural or supplied), and accessibility by vets, ride personnel and crews, if they are to be allowed. Bear in mind that ample water in spring may be no guarantee of adequate water in summer or fall.

Trail surface is an important factor. Pavement should be bypassed if at all possible, and kept to a minimum if unavoidable; make sure the surface is free of bottles and other debris. Roads, whether dirt or paved, which sustain heavy traffic should not be used. Long stretches of graveled road are hard on horses' legs and can cause stone bruises or road founder. Rocky trails can also cause hoof and leg damage, but it is unlikely that most desert and mountain rides can offer rock-free trails. Dirt roads with no gravel and forest trails are ideal.

Creating or Clearing Trail

Allow plenty of time for preparing your trail, as clearing or building new trail in wooded areas can take enormous amounts of effort and time. Limbs that could cause eye damage to a rider must be removed. A rule of thumb is that all limbs reachable overhead with long-handled limb loppers from the back of a horse should be removed. Anything lying on the trail should be easily stepped over at a walk or trot. Not all horses are willing to jump. It is preferable, though not always possible, to remove all larger obstacles from the trail. Try to avoid or repair any deep gullies, and select the safest route possible for crossing creeks. It is quite dangerous to enter or exit a creek by way of a steep, slippery or rocky bank. Boulders, probably the worst obstacles, could cause serious accidents if a horse wedges his leg between them or slips off of them.

Useful tools in clearing and building trail include a chainsaw, long-handled limb loppers, and two excellent fire-fighting tools, the Pulaski and the MacLeod. The latter two are available from loggers' and arborists' supply catalogs.

Measuring the Trail

Accurate trail measurement is not easy but is extremely important. Not only is it unfair for horses and riders to receive wrong credit for their miles, but riders pace themselves based on their expectations of the ride length. A ride that is significantly longer or shorter than advertised often causes rider complaints, something ride managers do not want or need.

The best measurement technique is by mechanical means, on the ground. Trucks, with 4-wheel drive if necessary, trail motorcycles, quad-runners, or mountain bicycles equipped with cyclometers all work well. A surveyors' wheel works on terrain too rugged for any other means. One can be made inexpensively from an old bicycle front wheel, a cyclometer and some plastic pipe. If it is impossible to take a physical measurement, a map measuring wheel (available from specialty catalogs, surveyors' supply or a good office supply store) can be used on a USGS topographic map. Set the wheel to the contour designation on the map and run it along the trail as closely as possible. Add 10% to your measurement (to accommodate the twists, turns and elevation changes) and you should come extremely close to the distance registered on a truck odometer for the same section of trail. The poorest method is estimating distance, and should be used only for short stretches of trail not shown on the map. A word of caution—agencies do not always have the correct mileage on signposts. Global Positioning Systems (GPS) are becoming more affordable and provide another option in measuring your trail. However, GPS only measure from point to point, not around curves, and they don't take elevation changes into consideration.

Marking the Trail

This is one of the most important responsibilities of the ride manager, along with correct measurement of the trail and selection of experienced, competent equine veterinarians. Nothing will cause dissatisfaction with a ride more than a poorly marked trail. If possible, have several horsemen assess your markings by pre-riding sections of your trail.

Marking Supplies. It is vitally important to choose marking materials that contrast boldly with the surroundings. Green and blue ribbons and striped ribbons do not show up well in forests, yellow and white are marginal if not combined with other, brighter colors. Fluorescent pink and orange are the best. Fluorescent pink or orange with polka dots also works well. Remember, too, that many men are somewhat colorblind, so polka dots would help them identify markings. Sometimes it works well to place two colors together, such as orange and blue, or pink and white. The bright colors catch the eye, while the less dominant colors can signify a different ride (30, as opposed to 50) or a different loop of the same mileage (loop 1, as opposed to loop 2 in the 50 miler). Tying two colors together is also a good way to differentiate between your ride and a timber harvest area. Forestry markings are often either one color alone or several colors together, and often include wide ribbons with printing on them.

Wherever possible, place ribbons on the right side of the trail, and advise of this at your ride briefing. In this manner, if the rider finds himself riding the trail and the ribbons are on the left, he will know that he took a wrong turn somewhere. There will always be times when there is nothing on the right-hand side on which to hang ribbons. In those cases, try to place a small wooden stake, metal rod, surveyor's stake or plastic pipe on which to hang flagging. A convenient method for hanging ribbons involves tying them to clothespins in advance. Large packages of 100 or more wooden clothespins can be purchased at hardware, variety or home supply stores. The ribbons are then much easier to hang and remove, either from horseback or vehicle, and are reusable year after year. Clip them onto a loop of twine so they can be worn across the shoulder while hanging them from horseback, and so they will hang straight when you store them for the winter. Crumpled ribbons are a real nuisance.

Arrows can be made cheaply by drawing them on inexpensive paper or plastic plates or more professionally by printing them on cover stock (available at office supply stores) with a computer, using a simple printing program (such as Print Artist) and a laser printer. Laser printing lasts longer than ink jet printing and will often survive through a wet winter (though the color will sun-bleach out of the paper). High-visibility colored cover stock, such as pink or orange, shows up the best just about anywhere, but especially in forests.

Day Markings. A good rule of thumb for hanging flagging is to place one about every 1/4 mile on trail that is straightforward—call them "security ribbons" as they help assure a rider that he is on the correct trail. Arrows stapled on trees or posts are a great way to mark confusing areas and turns. Dolomite arrows on the ground at turns are very helpful, as are bars of dolomite or white surveyors' tape tied across the trail not to be ridden. Warning signs indicating unmodified hazards ahead are important.

A word of caution: cattle and deer will eat flagging! If there are cattle in the area of your ride, you can count on this happening. Hang the flagging out of reach or wrap it around a stake, barber-pole style. Loose and windblown flags attract cows like a magnet.

Night Markings. Trails to be ridden at night need additional identification. Light colored flagging, signs made on white card stock or white paper plates, and chemical light sticks are necessary. Combining a bright color such as fluorescent orange or pink with white is helpful on rides that will start in, or extend into the darkness, the color catching the eye in daylight, the white being more visible at night. A good rule of thumb is to hang the light sticks periodically in darker forested areas. Open areas, especially on moonlit nights, will not need the light sticks, except at turns and particular spots. Red light sticks can be purchased and are especially good for warning of hazards such as washouts or low hanging branches. In some cases, it is not possible to repair or remove such hazards, so it is very wise to mark them with warning indicators. A word of caution: do not hang two light sticks on opposite sides of a hazard, such as a fence, deep ditch, or cattle guard. The riders will automatically go from one light to the next without always being able to see the hazard in between. Be sure to hang light sticks in such a way as to lead the riders *around* the hazard, such as *through* a gate next to the cattle guard not across the cattle guard itself. It is a good idea to hang the light sticks on the right, as well as the flagging. Riders will soon pick up on the consistency of the markings placement and it will make ride management's job easier if such consistency is practiced at all times.

Turns and Trail Splits. At trail deviations, such as an unexpected turn off the main trail, several markings are useful. Try hanging a group of three ribbons about 12" apart (warns of a turn), then reinforce this with two ribbons on the new trail, one just after the turn and another perhaps 25 feet from the first. An arrow stapled on a tree or post reinforces the ribbons and a dolomite bar or strip of white tape across the unwanted trail completes the marking. ***It is essential that riders can tell which way they will be turning, far enough in advance, to make the turn without slowing their pace.*** (I personally like to mark a turn three ways - flagging, dolomite, and arrows. No one has ever complained about an over-marked trail). If your trail has a split where one loop or mileage goes one way and another loop or mileage goes another way, be sure to make a sign with advice, such as "50 milers, loop 1 to vet check 2" or "30 milers, loop 2 to finish." Add an arrow with each sign and no one should have any hesitation about which way to go.

Another nice touch is to post landmark signs. If your ride has a significant feature such as a slide, huge rock, waterfall, or steep grade, it is fun to identify it. Eventually, your ride will become known for such landmarks. Landmarks are also useful in identifying a location where a horse might have come up lame, a rider injured or become ill, or a tree had fallen across the trail since you had last been there.

When to Mark. To avoid vandalism, consumption by cattle or deer, and general weather damage, it is best to mark your trail as close to the event date as possible. Then recheck critical areas the day before or even on the ride date, if these areas are easily accessible in a timely manner. Ribbons are best hung from tree branches so that they hang vertically out in the open and have less chance of being blown into the surrounding vegetation where they cannot be seen readily. Trail marking is a complex subject, and different methods work best in different areas. Try some of the methods recommended in this handbook and develop your own techniques for success.

Vet Check Sites

As you explore areas for trails, select prospective sites for vet checks. An ideal site has the advantage of easy accessibility for ride personnel and crews—if they are to be allowed, and a relatively level area with plenty of room for horses, riders, ride personnel and crews. It's best to have a parking area adjacent to, but not in, the vetting and crewing area. A supply of water is essential, whether it is from a natural or supplied source. A water trough is desirable, along with extra buckets supplied for crews to draw water for sponging horses. Avoid allowing crews to sponge horses directly out of the drinking water, as horses often won't drink water in which there is a salt and mud buildup. The water source should be close to the crewing area, as 5 gallons of water weighs 40 pounds and is difficult to carry.

Be sure to calculate the driving time from base camp to the vet check sites so that personnel can arrive there in plenty of time to set up and be ready for the first incoming horses. Be sure to consider any additional traffic on the day of the event when calculating access time to all check points. A 100-yard walk to the vet check is not unreasonable, if it is not possible to drive exactly to the site.

Start and Finish

Pay careful attention to both the first and last miles of your trail; this is where most accidents occur. If possible, the first mile needs plenty of room for passing and no hazards to endanger the horses in the excitement of the start. If such an area is not available, consider a controlled start where the riders stay behind a vehicle or designated rider or riders who will travel at a speed appropriate and safe for the terrain. When the terrain becomes safe, then the horses and riders can move out at their own pace. If the trail can be routed up a hill near the beginning of the ride, this will help settle the horses sooner. But caution the riders that too much speed and too steep a trail at the beginning of a ride can cause early fatigue in the unfit horse or tie-up in a horse that has not been adequately warmed up.

The finish is also extremely important. Prepare for front-runners to be racing for the finish. ***There must be enough room for two or more horses to race and there must be no sharp turns, steep banks, ditches or other hazards, no vehicles, no dogs or small children, and enough room after a run-out for the horses to stop safely.*** Establishing boundaries of the "race course" is advisable, such as placing stakes and tying twine or rope between them so that there is a barrier against vehicles entering. Snow fencing would work well and would go farther towards keeping children or dogs out. It is safer for all to prohibit dogs from being at the start-finish line.

The finish line must be predetermined and be marked the day before by some means. Dolomite lines across the trail are a defining mark, but many horses will shy from these and cause a loss of placing. (Tents that flap in the wind cause similar problems.) Two posts set in the ground far enough apart for two or three horses to pass between them safely work well. Overhead banners are an option.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Budget

It is important to make out a budget early in your planning and stick with it. Allow for unforeseen expenses, and do not overestimate the expected number of entries. Your regional director can be a lot of help to you here. Resist the temptation to go "first class" with everything on your first ride—it's easy to lose money on an endurance ride!

In planning your budget, be sure to allow for insurance and apply for your policy early. Not only do you need to protect yourself and your personnel and participants from liability, but also most landowners will not allow your trail to cross their property unless you have adequate liability insurance. The National Park Service, National Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and local parks are very strict about what they require in an insurance policy. AERC has an insurance policy that allows ride managers to purchase coverage for an affordable fee (see Appendix). Your regional director or the AERC office can be of help in this matter.

Publicity

Sanctioning the ride automatically lists it on the AERC ride calendar in *Endurance News* and on the www.aerc.org ride calendar. You will want to print notices months in advance and post them around in tack shops and feed stores. These should be short and to the point, giving a name, address, and phone number to contact for information. Ride entry blanks may be distributed at other rides. You might want to buy advertising in horse publications, local newspapers or *Endurance News*.

After the ride and when you've sent the results to the AERC office, you might write an article for *Endurance News,* including photographs. The more publicity you can generate after your ride, the more interest you will attract for your next ride.

Ride Flyer

A few months before your ride create a full ride brochure containing a map and/or precise directions to the campsite, an entry form, ride rules, vet check procedures and criteria, and other essential information. Be sure to include details regarding availability of water for people and horses. Advise of meals available, whether meals are to be potluck, and the distance from camp to the nearest gas station, grocery store, and cafe or restaurant. These flyers can be sent to the AERC office for posting to the AERC website, where they will be linked to the AERC ride calendar.

Food

Food for riders and crews is optional, but advise riders whether or not food is to be served or available. You should at least feed the vets and personnel a sack lunch on ride day, and if there is to be a banquet after the ride, this meal as well. Having coffee and muffins or pastries available for the vets and personnel on ride morning is a considerate gesture. Try to assign the food service to someone other than yourself, as managing the ride is enough of a job without having to deal with food. A riding club or non-riding friend/neighbor might enjoy this activity. Some rides advertise potluck meals—you bring your own meat and a side dish, ride management provides the salad, bread and a fire to grill the meat. There can be numerous variations of this sort of meal.

Water

Access to horse water must be considered in laying out your trail and in selecting your ride camp and vet check sites. Water that is acceptable for horses may not be safe for human consumption and people must be advised of this. Water availability must be stated in your ride flyer. Multi-day rides, especially point-to-point ones, may have one or more dry camps. You need to state this, so riders will come prepared with adequate water containers.

Vet checks can be supplied with water, if none is available naturally, by water truck or by tanker. You might be able to purchase an obsolete or surplus water tanker from an army supplies business. A typical unit holds 500 gallons, is mounted on its own two-wheeled trailer, and comes with a safety braking system. It must be pulled with a powerful pickup, as 500 gallons of water weighs two tons. Any large pickup that can pull a big horse trailer with two to three horses should do nicely.

It's ideal to provide two water troughs at a vet check, one for drinking and one for sponging. Post a sign advising riders and crews not to dip sweaty sponges in the drinking water.

THE DAY BEFORE

Rider Registration

The ride secretary and one helper should be able to handle all the pre-ride registration. Pre-entered riders can come to the registration table and pick up their packets with little or no further business. Others may owe a balance; still others may be last-minute entries. Riders should be prepared to show their AERC membership card, and non-members must pay an extra $15 fee.

Rider Packets

A typical rider packet contains the vet card, a trail map, meal tickets as necessary, and a list of competitors and their horses. Additional items may be information sheets, advertisements from awards donors, and entries for other upcoming rides.

Rider (Vet) Card. Every rider carries a rider or vet card throughout the entire ride. It needs a space for the rider's number and name, the horse's name and perhaps some horse information — color, sex, breed, and age. There are spaces for times and metabolic factors, plus space for vet comments. It needs to be made of durable stock such as cover or index card stock. It is useful to color code the card stock to the color code of the ride, if there is one. Separate colors for the endurance ride(s) and the LD rides are helpful. A small plastic bag with zip closure is helpful for keeping the card dry and relatively clean. Rider cards presented at a vet check looking as though they had been through a dishwasher make the recording and reading of data very difficult. See Appendix D for sample rider cards.

Trail Maps. Maps can be very simple drawings or can be copied from USGS topographical maps with the trail drawn in. It's useful to mark water locations, steep portions of the trail, hazards, and creek and road crossings. If different loops are used for different mileages, identify so on your trail map, as well as the color of flagging used.

Rider List. Many riders like a list of the entrants, sometimes to satisfy curiosity, sometimes to gauge their competition. It is important to see which horse each rider is using and fun to see where the rider lives. See Appendix C on Using the Computer to Help Manage a Ride.

Meal Tickets (if applicable). Stapling meal tickets on the inside of the rider packet envelope helps avoid loss or misplacement of the tickets.

Pre-Ride Vet Check

Try to set up your vet check area so that the ground is as flat and with as few holes as possible. Provide each vet with a recorder (vet secretary), who will record all the vet's findings on the rider card. The vets will give each horse a thorough examination, record resting metabolic factors and check for soundness.

Identifying Competitors

The easiest way to identify the horse-rider teams is to assign a number to each as they enter your ride. This number is recorded on the rider packet, the rider (vet) card, the rider list and the finish order. After passing a pre-ride exam, the horse is marked with a livestock paint stick on each hip using that same number. Yellow and orange are the most conspicuous colors, and black is excellent on light grey horses, but it is difficult to find this color in livestock supply stores. If you can find it, though, it's good to buy a supply. Green and blue, while clearly read when first applied, tend to rub off if the horse is blanketed at night or if he rolls.

If you are offering two or more mileages, it is useful to identify the riders by different prefix numbers, i.e. 501, 502, etc. for 50 milers, 301, 302 for 30 milers, 701, 702, etc. for 70 milers and 101, 102, 103, etc. for 100 milers. Straight numbering i.e. 1, 2, 3 is fine if there is only one mileage. You could also use straight numbering for a 50 miler and 201, etc. for a 25 miler, 301, etc. for a 30 miler.

Pre-Ride Briefing

This is your, the ride manager's, performance. The briefing should include a welcome to the riders and an introduction of the veterinarians and other key personnel. If your personnel are from a local group, it's thoughtful to give them public credit. Announce the location of the start-finish, ride completion criteria, start times, and the time of best condition judging for the top ten horses (this is usually done about one hour after they all have crossed the finish line). Review the mileage at each vet check and the cut-off time, if one is to be used. Also state the hold time at each vet check. The head vet will set criteria for the ride, and you let him or her advise the riders after you have completed your part of the briefing.

A description of particular points on the trail, such as hazards, difficult terrain, or unexpected turns is important, but don't try to describe every little detail, as you will lose the audience's attention if your briefing is too long and complicated. Remember, riders may or may not have been in this area before, and they are unlikely to recognize the spots you are trying so hard to describe. If you have marked the trail as well as you should have, riders are not likely to take the wrong trail. Keep your briefing simple and to the point, and when finished, ask if there are any questions.

If you are offering a limited distance ride along with the endurance ride, you must brief the LD riders with information regarding their own ride. Especially important is the finish criteria, which is different from the endurance ride. Limited distance riders do not receive a "finish time" until the horse has recovered to a 60 pulse, no matter what time they crossed the finish line. Some of your LD riders may be entering their very first event, and if you make them comfortable about what they can expect, they are more likely to have fun, return to your ride, and go on to longer mileages.

A sample new rider briefing is available from the "forms" page of the Ride Managers section of the AERC website.

RIDE PERSONNEL AND DUTIES

Ride Manager

As a ride manager you are responsible for operating a smooth-running ride. Keep this in mind when selecting people to help you with your ride. You can have a great deal of discontent, griping, problems and formal protests if you are not capable of making tough decisions and sticking by them. However, your decisions must be in line with the AERC rules. You can, for the safety of the horse or riders, impose stricter criteria, but you ***cannot ignore*** AERC rules. No matter how well you think you know the rules, re-read the book a week or two before your ride and have it handy on ride day.

To avoid the majority of problems you must: 1) provide a correctly measured and ***well-marked*** trail, 2) hire competent equine veterinarians who are experienced with endurance horses and rides, 3) treat every competitor fairly, with no exceptions or allowances, and 4) not make any unnecessary rules. Any rules you plan to have, including completion criteria, that are different from

AERC's must be written down and available to riders before the start of your ride.

To avoid confusion for riders and ride personnel, keep criteria for ***all*** distances the same at any given vet check. It is important to keep procedures as simple as possible, especially when volunteers new to the sport are involved.

Another role of the ride manager is that of host or hostess. In planning or implementing this event, you should treat your competitors and their horses as your guests and keep their welfare and safety in mind as you plan your ride. The trail should be planned for the equines' needs and abilities, not for ease of marking. Be sure the footing will be safe during the season in which the ride is taking place.

If you are planning to compete in your own ride, you must have a pre-designated alternate manager who will make decisions and take action while you are out on the trail. The alternate manager must also be an AERC member, have in-depth knowledge of the sport of endurance riding, be familiar with the trail, and be somewhat acquainted with other ride personnel.

Ride Secretary

The ride secretary is in charge of filling requests for entry blanks, taking entries and recording all pertinent information. He/she is also responsible for compiling results and maintaining a master list of entries. In addition to having some basic secretarial or bookkeeping experience, the ride secretary should have good people skills. The secretary's phone number, fax number and/or e-mail address should be on both the entry blank and the information sheet for your ride and that person is the contact person for your ride. He/she must have the time to answer telephone queries correctly and completely. A telephone message recorder is of enormous help in this job. Some ride managers act as their own secretary, or they may answer all inquiries and then use a ride secretary to help with registration the day before the ride and with paperwork afterwards. The ride secretary must be certain to collect ***all*** rider cards after the final vetting, as the cards contain valuable information for ride results.

Ride Veterinarians

Choose for your head veterinarian one with the greatest experience and people skills. This person is listed on the AERC sanctioning application form when you send it to your regional sanctioning director for approval. The application will in turn be sent to the AERC office and your date, along with the head vet's name and other information about your ride, will be published in the monthly *Endurance News.* It is best to have your head vet committed about six months before your ride, if possible. The head vet may suggest and secure the services of additional vets whom you have mutually agreed upon, or an experienced ride manager may contact and secure the vets himself. Depending on the nature of your trail, number and type of vet checks and accessibility, one vet per 15-25 horses is suggested. A minimum of two is suggested on all rides, since one may be called upon for a treatment situation and be unable to provide veterinary control.

All vets must be familiar with the AERC Veterinarian's Handbook. The head vet must be experienced in veterinary control of endurance rides and needs to be familiar with the physiology and pathophysiology involved in endurance riding. It is recommended that the head vet have passed the AERC Veterinary Certification exam. A list of AERC-certified head veterinarians can be found the one AERC website. All other ride veterinarians must be experienced equine vets. This is extremely important to ensure proper treatment of horses experiencing the stress disorders that can occur in this sport.

Since you as ride manager are hiring the vets, be sure your vets are those with whom you can work comfortably as a team. In some instances you may have more familiarity with endurance and AERC procedure than vets new to the sport. Be sure to confer and work closely with your head vet so there are no misunderstandings regarding your positions, duties, and responsibilities. The veterinarian's decision is ***final*** in all matters concerning safety and well being of the horses.

You as ride manager are responsible for upholding AERC rules and regional rules (parks, Forest Service, BLM, etc.). Ride management has the right to eliminate from competition any rider for reasons of cruelty, poor sportsmanship, harassment of ride personnel or failure to uphold rules, even if the rider has passed the veterinary examinations.

Veterinary Recorder (Secretary)

Veterinary recorders (also called secretaries) record the information at the various vet checks including the pre-ride check-in. Provide one for each veterinarian. The recorder's duty is to write down on the proper form all information dictated by the vet during any examination of a horse, including the time the check was done (this has nothing to do with any timing into or out of the vet check). The time is needed only if there is a question later as to when the check was performed. This job offers a great opportunity to someone who wants to learn about the mechanics and metabolics of endurance horses.

Pulse and Respiration Personnel

It is important to have people experienced in taking pulse and respiration readings to staff this team, as they will ensure the horse has met the specified criteria before recording the P&R readings on the rider card. The horse's hold time is based upon the time it reached the criteria dictated for the ride. P&R are taken before passing the horse on to the veterinarian for further examination. Well-trained P&R teams can remove a significant burden from the vets and enhance the efficiency of the check. Two P&R teams per vet are recommended, but the job can be done with only one, depending on the number of entries. One person may serve as a recorder for the other, or one may take the pulse while the other is watching the respiration. If experienced people are not readily available, the ride manager can arrange a clinic for training purposes. Students from a local university vet school can be a source of P&R crews.

Timers

The responsibility of timers is to keep track of arrival and departure of the riders. Experienced timers are very important even if other volunteers are new to the sport, as they are critical to ensuring the vet checks run smoothly and equitably. There should be at least two timers at each station, the incoming side and the outgoing side of the vet check. It is very helpful to have one timer fielding horses' numbers and the other recording them on both rider cards and a timer sheet. Timers are needed at the finish line (again, two are a minimum, to make accurate recordings and to pass judgment in case of a close race or tie) and all vet checks with timed holds. At ***gate*** type vet checks, it is valuable to have timers recording the ***arrival time*** of the horse on the rider card. The P&R teams then record the ***recovery time*** and the P&R readings on the rider card, and the vet can tell how long it took the horse to recover to ride criteria. The AERC Veterinary Committee recommends this type of vet check above all others (more on vet checks later).

It is critical for all timers' watches to be synchronized before the start of the ride and rechecked periodically for synchronization. Do not expect one person to serve as both timer and vet recorder, as it cannot be done properly. Timers record both arrival and departure of the horses (as appropriate to the type of check) and give riders the OK to leave a timed hold. It is their responsibility to verify that no rider leaves prematurely; they are the clock-watchers. It is not the responsibility of the timer to call riders to leave. He needs an assistant to record numbers and call riders when their time is up and it's OK for them to leave.

The finish line timer records the finish time of each rider using the horse/rider number on a master sheet at the finish line. Calculations are done after all entries are in. With rides using fixed holds, the ***hold times*** are subtracted from the ***overall elapsed time*** to establish the ***riding time***.

Spotters

Spotters are useful wherever riders could illegally use an existing shortcut to gain an advantage of time and reduced mileage. Be sure spotters know their instructions and the trail explicitly and they do not leave until ***all*** riders have passed by. They should record numbers as the horse/rider teams pass. Ham radio operators are useful for this job, as they can also relay information back to camp or on to the next vet check. This is especially helpful in keeping track of all riders. If a rider was lost or sick/injured, or if there was a sick/injured horse, ride management would have the information and could act upon it.

Drag Rider(s)

This is an important job for one or two riders, as they can pull flagging, remove signs, close gates, and assist any riders in need. Two are preferred, in case of rider injury. They also may pick up items dropped on the trail by the competitors. This can also be done by ATV or trail bike, if such vehicles are allowed on the trail.

Farrier

It is unusual for an endurance ride to be held without someone's horse losing a shoe. In the past, having a farrier at your ride may have made the difference between a rider finishing or being pulled. Now, many riders carry hoof boots, and the use of these can save a horse from lameness in case of a lost shoe.

Some larger rides may be able to hire a farrier to be on standby, but it may be prohibitively expensive for rides with smaller attendance. Ride management usually is responsible for standby charges, while the farrier charges individual riders for his work. The amount the farrier receives from individual riders may be deducted from his standby charge. Other large rides may pay the farrier a set amount that covers all of his work and is a courtesy to the riders.

The farrier should be available at the vet checks with a long hold. If there is only one farrier for the ride, good communication between vet checks is important, especially for the front-running riders, whose success may be highly dependent on the prompt availability of the farrier.

Ride Steward

Any ride offering a single prize valued in excess of $1,000 shall agree to pay the expenses for an AERC-approved steward to attend and monitor the event. The steward is selected by the ride manager from a list of three nominees prepared by the directors of the region in which the event takes place. To assure there is no conflict of interest, neither the ride steward nor any member of his/her family may ride in the event. Nor may he/she have any interest in an equine entered in the event. The steward must be a member of AERC and have no conflict of interest with the ride or AERC. Check the AERC rule book for duties and use of a steward.

VETERINARY CONTROL

General

The purpose of veterinary control at endurance rides is both to protect the horses and help the riders complete the ride safely. The selection of vet check types, location and accessibility will significantly affect the number of veterinarians needed. All veterinarians working your ride must be AERC members. Any vets not members at the time may join at your ride; some ride managers even pay their modest membership fee as a courtesy. Work closely with your head veterinarian to determine how many vets overall are needed. The cost of vet services is one of your largest budget items and will markedly affect your budget. Too many vets will drain your budget; too few will result in inefficient progress of your ride and will elicit complaints from the riders. You should read the AERC veterinary handbook. Some of it is technical, but most of it is written in terms a layman can understand, and it contains the latest standards recommended by the AERC for veterinary control at endurance rides.

Be certain that each of your veterinarians has a copy of the Veterinary Guidelines for Judging AERC Endurance Competitions (vet handbook) well before your ride, and ask all of them to read it.

Ride management selects the trail, and its layout, distance and difficulty will determine the number and type of vet checks during a ride. All rides ***must*** have a pre-ride vet check where the ride veterinarians examine each horse and record the particulars on the rider's card (supplied by the ride management.) The card is to be carried by the rider and submitted to the head vet secretary at the end of the ride or at any time the horse may be disqualified during the event. The pre-ride and post-ride vet checks are done in camp. Note that on a point-to-point ride, the camp will change every day.

Ride management and the ride veterinarians should discuss the trail, its difficulty and the probable weather. From that discussion comes the plan for the number and type of vet checks and the criteria at each.

Pre-Ride Check

Always provide safe ground and try to ensure an open and level area on which to trot out the horses. Most rides should have this check take place on the afternoon or evening before the ride date. It should be strongly emphasized that all riders present their horses for the pre-ride exam during the prescribed hours, thus allowing time for management, vets and staff to have dinner and to conduct a pre-ride briefing. Riders who are unable to arrive on time should be requested to notify ride management in advance. Most vets prefer not to have to conduct an exam in the darkness by artificial light. In unavoidable cases, a few horses may be vetted in the morning before the ride starts.

It is customary for ride management to return most or all of the ride entry fee to riders whose horses have not passed the pre-ride vet exam.

Vet Check Types

Depending on terrain, weather and length of the ride, you will need several vet checks, from 10 to 25 miles apart.

In some regions, ride vets like to have a last check between five and 10 miles from the finish line, as this is where the pace may become the most intense. Water should be available at ***every*** vet check, whether from natural sources or by ride management provision. If neither of these is an option, ***inform the crews in advance*** so they may bring water to their rider and horse.

There are several types of vet checks used on endurance rides (descriptions follow in order of preference), and you and your head vet will decide which of these you will use and at what locations.

1. Gate Into Timed Hold. This is by far the preferred type of vet check, as it gives advantage to the truly well-conditioned horses. In ideal circumstances the gate check follows this procedure: The rider arrives, presents his card to the ***In Timer*** (who records ***Arrival Time***) and is free to present his horse to the ***P&R team*** when he believes the horse is recovered to the criteria of that checkpoint. If the horse is recovered, the P&R team records ***Recovery Time***, and it is from this time that the overall ***Hold Time*** for this check is taken. Thus, a horse might arrive at the vet check at 8:45 but not recover until 8:51. If the hold time is 60 minutes, the rider's ***Out Time*** will be 9:51. The Out Time may be recorded on the rider card or the Out Timer may record it on a master sheet. In either case, the rider or his crew is responsible for watching his time. The ***Out Timer*** will hold the rider until the exact time before he will release the rider to go out on the trail.

Another way to conduct this gate is for the rider to monitor his horse and call for a P&R check. The P&R team records any or all riders' requests for P&R and it is from this time the hold is based. The riders then present their horses for P&R and vet checks, and assuming all the horses pass both checks, all horses with the same P&R ***request*** times may leave together. Any horse not passing P&R criteria the first time may be re-presented again, but any horse not recovering by the end of 30 minutes is disqualified. This is a useful and fair way to conduct the check if several riders request their P&Rs at the same moment and cannot all be processed at once by the P&R teams.

The timed hold following a gate can be of any length from 10 minutes to one hour, but it is important to base the hold respective to the mileage of the checkpoint. A one-hour hold is essential to allowing the horse to refuel and rehydrate and, as such, is recommended for checks farther into the ride.

2. Gate or Stop and Go Check. This gate is similar to the previous gate check with the exception of not requiring a hold time. The rider is free to leave as soon as the horse has met the required P&R criteria and is approved by the vet. There may be enough P&R teams to monitor pulse or the responsibility can be placed on the rider or crew to check the horse and present him to the vet when he is ready to stand inspection. If the horse's P&R don't pass, he must be brought back later for a re-check. Large rides may impose a minimum time before the horse can be re-presented. A horse is not allowed to leave the checkpoint if he does not meet ***all*** criteria.

Even if a horse meets P&R criteria, if other vital signs suggest a potential problem the horse will be held until a full recovery is achieved or the horse is disqualified.

One advantage of this type of check is that it can slow the pace of the ride by discouraging the rider from charging the vet checks and depending on a 30-60 minute hold for the horse to recover. The disadvantage is that it allows no time for the horse to eat, drink and relax.

3. Ten/Ten Check. This is another combination type of check. Horses are checked at a fixed 10 minutes after arrival. If they pass the P&R criteria, they have an additional 10-minute hold time before leaving. If they have not recovered, any additional time needed to recover to P&R criteria is added to the hold time. Essentially the check becomes just like a gate into a timed hold. ***It is recommended that the rider not present his horse until the horse has recovered.***

The hold time can be longer than 10 minutes, as appropriate, i.e. 10/20 or 10/30. This check retains most of the advantages of the gate into a timed hold but allows the horses that arrive together to leave together, providing none are being significantly overpaced. However, it penalizes the horses with the best recovery abilities and thus is ***not favored by the AERC Veterinary Committee***.

4. Fixed Hold. This is historically the oldest type of vet check. All riders are held a specific amount of time (generally 10 to 60 minutes). This period of time is not held against their riding time and the horses are examined at a specific time after their official arrival at the checkpoint (typically, 30 minutes after arrival at a 60-minute stop). It is crucial to time horses in and out to the nearest second, not just the nearest minute.

Drawbacks to fixed holds include a greater chance of the horse stiffening up, especially in cold weather. A fixed hold early in a ride is unnecessary. The fit horses are ready to go but must wait. Usually the riders walk them around to keep them calm and the muscles loose. It is better to keep them moving on the trail than around and around in a vet stop. The biggest disadvantage is that an over-paced, unfit horse can recover enough to leave and continue with the fitter horses. This could lead to fatigue and metabolic failure. ***This is the least desirable and least favored type of vet check, and consequently not recommended.***

Post-Finish Check

At the post-finish vet check the final criteria for completion must be met, and the horse has not completed the ride until he has passed this check. The post-finish check acts as a safety check to monitor late-developing problems as well as extending veterinary control over the last leg of the ride. Because the horse at the finish is not in actuality going on—not going into remote areas far from veterinary aid—the standards for completion need not be as strict as those on the trail. Completion criteria must be set by the head vet in consultation with ride management and announced at the pre-ride briefing so that all entrants understand it.

AERC's minimum criteria for completion is as follows:

1. **All horses must stand a mandatory one-hour post-ride evaluation.** It is usually feasible to allow riders to present their horses for the final exam any time within the one-hour period. This minimizes congestion and is recognized as an advantage to the good horseman and the well-conditioned horse.
2. **The horse must reach a 68 pulse recovery (60 for limited distance events).** The veterinarian(s) may allow a higher pulse criteria in documented extreme weather conditions.
3. **The horse must be sound at the trot.** It must be recognized that we are dealing with a risk sport with its inherent wear and tear. Vet judges must be flexible enough to evaluate the horse injured after completing the course, etc. This is passed as a very minimal criteria, not designed to disqualify legitimate stiffness and leg weariness, but to discourage over-usage between the last veterinary checkpoint and the finish line.
4. **The horse may not have received medical treatment by a veterinarian or layman prior to the final examination.** Any horse that a ride vet advises should be treated, but for whom the rider or owner refuses treatment, shall be considered in the same light as a treated horse and will be disallowed completion.
5. **Evaluation of other monitoring parameters must indicate the horse is not in need of any medical treatment.** It must be borne in mind that pulse and respiration are but two of the important parameters considered in the state of condition evaluation. Evaluate the entire horse.
6. **The horse must be metabolically stable, sufficient to demonstrate "fit to continue."** Soreness, lacerations or wounds that are aggravated to the degree that affects the horse's ability to continue may also be a cause for failure to receive completion.

Should ride management or the veterinarians wish to use stricter standards, ***the head veterinarian, in consultation with ride management, must decide what the standard will be, and then make sure that all competitors understand!*** Ideally, this should be in the ride brochure so that the riders will know what to expect before coming to the ride. In any case, it must be in written form to the riders before the start of the ride.

Best Condition Judging

The best condition award is determined by a three-part procedure based on riding time, weight carried, and a veterinary examination. The first 10 horses to finish are eligible to stand for this award, including those ridden by juniors, regardless of riding time. If, in the opinion of the vets, none of these horses deserve best condition, the award need not be given. Although AERC recognizes only one such winner at each ride, ride management may give other best condition awards as well, but only if the approved AERC procedure is used in the judging. An example might be runner-up best condition or highest vet score.

See the AERC best condition score sheet for complete information on judging and scoring for this prestigious award. The vet team will judge the horse's way of going and his physical condition, ride management will complete the form by adding up the scores and doing the mathematical calculations. In case of identical scores, the horse having the best vet score among those tied is the winner. If there is still a tie, the horse finishing first among those still tied will be declared the winner.

The AERC best condition system has been developed over a long period of time, with the contributed expertise of many riders, ride managers and veterinarians. Credit for best condition is given only when the AERC form is used and ***submitted with the ride results***. Ride management should be sure their veterinary staff is familiar with the system, as most rider complaints regarding best condition result from vets deviating from the established form. Be sure to announce best condition judging times sufficiently in advance so that riders have time to prepare their horses for presentation.

AFTER THE RIDE FINISH

Awards

Awards can be almost anything, but some sort of completion award must be given. Silver belt buckles are an example of one end of the spectrum, paper certificates on the other. Entry fees usually reflect to some degree the value of the award. Longtime competitors may opt to ride for a certificate, as they may have so many awards that there is no room in their house for more. One idea is a plaque on which additional date plates can be added after the first completion. Riders also welcome a reduced entry fee, permitted by the lesser cost of a plate as opposed to a plaque, and several years of completions are reflected on the one plaque. Many riders like useful awards: buckets, hoof picks, rope halters, a sack of grain, a currycomb. There is little correlation between the expense of the awards and the satisfaction felt by the riders. Don't put your entire awards budget into the front-runners' hardware; "To Finish is to Win" is the motto of endurance riding and the awards should reflect this, too. Local veterinarians, feed suppliers, tack stores, and national horse catalog companies might be contacted for donations.

Awards Presentation Ceremony

Do not have your awards presentation while there are any riders still on the trail. The last to finish worked as hard, or harder, than the front-runners and deserves equal recognition at the ceremony.

Start the presentation with the last rider and work toward the first to finish. It makes the presentation more meaningful and interesting to state the horse's name as well as the rider's and to give a brief statement about either or both. A rider will sometimes wish to make a statement about his horse. Keep it brief so there is time for all.

Try not to take it personally if riders wish to go home before the ceremony, but make it clear that they must pick up their awards first, or you will be paying for postage and packaging and spending lots of time sending awards later.

RIDE FOLLOW-UP

Tabulating Ride Results

The sooner you do this, the better, as AERC needs the results so they can be processed quickly. If you wish to send results to the riders, most of them truly enjoy having them. Many riders like to see their times into each vet check, along with the time it took their horses to recover to criteria. It is extra work for the ride manager, but gratifying in terms of rider satisfaction.

Sending Results to AERC

AERC requires results to be submitted within 30 days, but again, the sooner the better. After 30 days, penalties begin to accrue. It is extremely important to submit AERC ID numbers for both horses and riders. Since all records are now on computer, use of these ID numbers saves the office personnel enormous amounts of time in keeping accurate records. Along with the results, the veterinary report, the best condition judging forms, the assessment form and a check for the rider fees must be submitted. At the same time or shortly thereafter, the ride manager may submit a re-sanction form to the regional sanctioning director to schedule the ride for the following year.

Other Post-Ride Responsibilities

Post-ride duties include paying the vets and other personnel as required, and writing thank you notes to volunteers. Depending on where the ride is staged, duties may include cleaning up the staging area and disposal of any garbage and trash. Others duties may come to mind, but these are the basic essentials.

APPENDIX A
Ride Management Checklist

Nine to 12 Months Before Ride
- If new to ride management, attend other rides in your region to observe and help out.
- Select staging area and establish and measure the trail.
- Set up initial meeting with Forest Service, BLM, or Parks personnel.
- Contact your AERC regional sanctioning director for dates, forms, etc.
- Select ride date and possible alternate.
- Set up tentative budget, including entry fees.
- Arrange for head veterinarian and get commitments for additional vets.
- Consider various options for awards and begin checking prices.

Five to Six Months Before Ride
- Double-check permission from land agencies and/or private landowners.
- Send in completed sanctioning form to sanctioning director.
- Arrange for ride photographer.

Three to Four Months Before Ride
- Write up publicity, ride flyers and get them ready for mailing.
- Post flyers in local tack shops, feed stores, etc., and mail flyers to prospective riders. The AERC office can provide you with mailing labels for your region's members at a nominal cost.
- Purchase ride insurance for additional insureds, if necessary.
- Order completion awards.
- Check on head veterinarian and assistant vets, if needed.
- Clear trail, trim overhanging branches, etc.
- Arrange to rent or borrow equipment: outhouses, water tanks, etc.
- Have meeting with key ride personnel, discuss plans.
- Determine vehicle logistics and driving times for transporting P&R teams, timers and veterinarians to checkpoints.

One to Two Months Before Ride
- Send ride brochures to those responding to ads and to all regional members, if desired.
- Check supply of forms, rider cards; create on computer or have printed.
- Make sleeping arrangements for vets.
- Plan food.
- Be sure permits from national, state and/or county agencies are in process; most will require proof of insurance.
- Organize supplies, especially trail marking needs; purchase or order paint sticks for marking horses.
- Confirm meals needed with caterer, if used.

One to Two Weeks Before Ride
- Confirm that all veterinarians and key ride personnel are still available.
- Check communication and routes to vet checks.
- Ensure adequate transportation to checkpoints and be sure all drivers know the routes and driving time to checkpoints. A printed description of directions to checkpoints, mileage from point to point, and driving time is extremely useful for personnel as well as crews.
- Start to mark trail, starting with the more remote areas and saving the more public ones until last. Vandals are always a problem.
- Ensure supplies of toilet paper, pens, timer sheets, etc.

Two to Five Days Before Ride
- Buy food, if you are preparing it yourself.
- Check and complete trail marking.
- Transport equipment such as water tanks, outhouses, etc.
- Post signs to staging area.

Day Before Ride
- Set up or move ride office complete with supplies; include a scale for weigh-in of riders.
- Set up vet check area.
- Organize food for ride workers, especially food to be sent out of camp vet checks.

Night Before Ride

- Sign up riders or distribute rider packets, if pre-organized.
- Organize vetting in of horses; need one vet secretary per vet.
- Hold pre-ride meeting (your show): introduce vets and ride personnel.
- Hold vet briefing (head vet's show).
- Synchronize timers' watches.
- Get a good night's sleep (hopefully).

Day of Ride

- Place spotters and vet crews.
- Start ride.
- Deal with all problems as they arise in a calm, efficient manner.
- Have a post-ride meeting, give out awards.
- Give thanks to ride personnel and volunteers and thank everyone for coming.

After Ride

- Return rented or borrowed equipment.
- Clean up campsite.
- Remove markers from trail, signs, etc. if drag riders have not done so already.
- Send thank you notes to landowners and ride personnel.
- Prepare and send in ride results to AERC. Post ride results on Internet, if applicable.
- Write article about ride.

APPENDIX B - AERC FORMS

Sample Ride Entry Form

Sample Alternative Rider Card

Sample Timer Sheet

Sample Finish Line Form

Setup for Recording Entries

Setup for Registering Riders

Report for AERC Ride Results

These forms are available online through the Forms page on the Ride Managers section of the AERC website or upon request from the AERC office.

APPENDIX C
The Computer as a Ride Management Tool

The computer can be at once a useful tool and a considerable frustration. However, it you already have skills in word processing, database, spreadsheet and graphics, you can put the computer to work and produce some very professional results. The following are some programs that work well:

- A database program
- A spreadsheet program
- A word processing program
- ***Or*** a program that combines all three
- A simple graphics program for making signs and arrows

A database is used to keep records of all the entered riders, their addresses and other pertinent information, including their AERC ID numbers and all information for the horses, including their AERC numbers. This information can be accessed and used to print up any sort of report, such as rider list, mailing labels, and AERC ride results. The spreadsheet can be used to list the riders, the number of meals they want (if meals are an option), the amount of the entry fee, the amount the rider has paid (or not, as the case may be), the amount that is due, etc. The spreadsheet can also be used to work out a budget for the ride and keep records of expenses and income.

The word processing program can be used to write letters, design ride entry forms, and in the case of the interactive program that contains all of the above types, to design mailing or other types of labels that print from the database information.

A simple graphics program can be used to print arrows of any type or size and to make informational signs.

It takes months to learn to make these programs work for you if you do not already know how to use them. If you don't, you might find it too much trouble and taking too much time to learn. If you have time for the challenge of learning to become proficient, the use of the computer and a laser printer produces a great sense of satisfaction and does a beautiful job.

APPENDIX D – Ride Management Forms

Ride Sanctioning Application

Ride Change Request

AERC Recommended Rider Card

Best Condition Judging Form

Ride Results Form

These forms are available online through the Forms page on the Ride Managers section of the AERC website or upon request from the AERC office.

APPENDIX E

Guideline for Endurance Rides on National Forest, BLM, National or State Park Lands

Presenting the concept to a District Ranger

- Arrange preliminary meeting
- Be organized

  Arrive with concept and basic plans. Plenty of lead-time is advisable and courteous. You will need:
- To define the event (explain the sport of endurance riding)
- To explain why public land is needed
- To lay out ride details including:
  - ✔ Tentative date
  - ✔ Group size, to include number of horses and people
  - ✔ How ride will be set up
    - ✘ Camping area – durable site, culinary and stock water, parking, parking, sanitary facilities
  - ✔ Course layout
    - ✘ Ride management solicits suggestions from local ranger
    - ✘ Ride management presents own plan
    - ✘ Vet check locations
    - ✘ Type of proposed trail markings, permanent and temporary
  - ✔ Entry fees; explain where the money goes, and that it is not a profit-making sporting event
    - ✘ Completion awards
    - ✘ Veterinary fees
    - ✘ Sanctioning fees
    - ✘ Other costs to insure welfare of entrants
- ✔ Emergency situations
  - ✘ Injury to people, local EMT unit advised of activity
  - ✘ Fire prevention (no smoking on trails)
- ✔ Concessions (if any)
  - ✘ Food stand, photographer
- ✔ Developing communication and understanding with Ranger
- ✔ Describe ride organization, history, previous events, geographic area of participants' residence
- ✔ Ride Manager's experience, qualifications
- ✔ Reference - other Public Land agencies worked with
- ✔ Indicate desire to:
  - ✘ Maintain and upgrade trails
  - ✘ Leave area in better condition than you found it
  - ✘ Do trail work, pruning, etc. as you are preparing for ride
- ✔ Complete all required forms
  - ✘ Be aware of agency regulations covering this type of event – national, regional, and local
- ✔ Application form 2700 3
  - ✘ Individual
  - ✘ Corporation:

    articles of incorporation

    supplement to application
- ✔ Special Use Permit will be prepared by the agency
  - ✘ Fees

    Minimum fee is dependent on agency you are dealing with. There may be a filing fee plus a special events fee.
  - ✘ Insurance – requirements vary by agency
  - ✘ AERC insurance

    Require a copy of the policy and certificate listing the agency or federal governments as additional insured. The agency will have a form for the insurance company to complete.
  - ✘ Performance bond – basically insures clean-up and site rehabilitation