

Getting Started in West Kingdom Equestrian Activities – FAQ's for Horse Owners, Horse Borrowers, Horse Renters, and the Equestrian Curious

Welcome to the West Kingdom Equestrian program and thank you for your interest. In the West, equestrians enjoy a tremendous amount of support from the Kingdom. In turn, we try to give back to the Kingdom the ambience of horses in the Middle Ages as best we are able. Equestrians are a feisty lot, who resemble addicts especially when allowed to talk about anything horse related. Some Equestrians can appear shy outside of their native environment. We suggest asking them about their horses to make them feel at ease. We may not always seem like it, but we are always happy to have more folks join us for the ride.

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Q: I don't know any of the equestrian people in the SCA, so how do I get involved?

A: The short answers are [talk to an officer](#), [participate in social media](#), [come to an event or practice](#), and/or [bring your horse to an event or practice](#).

A1: One of the simplest things to do is to contact your Kingdom or Principality Equestrian Officer. If you are new to the SCA or the West Kingdom, start with the Kingdom Equestrian Officer or the Chatelaine who is our newcomer officer.

West Kingdom Equestrian Officer - equestrian@westkingom.org

West Kingdom Chatelaine – chatelaine@westkingom.org

Mists Principality Equestrian Officer – equestrian@mist.westkingom.org

Cynaguan Principality Equestrian Officer – equestrian@cynagua.westkingdom.org

Oerthan Principality Equestrian Officer – equestrian@oertha.westkingdom.org

Do: Let them know where you are, what your SCA and mundane riding experience levels are. Let them know your specific interests.

Don't: Feel like any question is too dumb to ask or be surprised if they refer you to someone who is more local to you.

A2: If you are feeling more adventurous, ask a question on one of the various social media sites. Questions on the Kingdom or Principality-wide general information sites will usually solicit a response from one of the many horse people. If you are feeling a bit more committed, join one of the Eq specific sites and lurk or start asking questions.

["West Kingdom Equestrian Group" Facebook Page](#)

["WestEq" Yahoo Group](#)

Do: Let folks know what you are looking for such as events/practices near you or for a [mentor](#). Include what area you are in as that helps folks identify convenient to you events and resources. Ask questions! Attend events, practices, and workshops that are advertised – they are a great place to meet equestrians. Explore areas of equestrian arts beyond riding – horses were everywhere in period.

Don't: Be put off if you are not immediately offered rides on someone's personal horse - many horse owners like to get to know someone before they offer to share their horses. If list members seem to be squabbling with each other from time to time – horse people hold diverse and strong opinions that they sometimes share stridently amongst themselves and frequently they forget to employ company manners.

A3: If you like the face-to-face touch, one of the best ways to get involved and to meet equestrians is to attend events, practices, workshops, and meetings. These activities are frequently advertised on the social media outlets above. Additionally a listing of these can be found in the [Equestrian Event Database](#).

Do: Introduce yourself to people and let them know that you are new. Be honest and forthright about your experience level – not only is it important for maintaining safety, it lets the horse folk know how much equestrian-ese you are likely to understand. Help out where you can – many horse owners make a point of sharing ride time with ground crew. Take advantage of learning everything you can – the more you know how to do things safely on your own, the easier it is for folks to share a horse with you.

Don't: Be put off if you are not immediately offered rides on someone's personal horse - many horse owners like to get to know someone before they offer to share their horses. If someone is engrossed in their riding and doesn't notice you or talk to you immediately (horse people are a bit like addicts), please just wait or speak up. Be prepared to be inundated with information when they have a moment.

A4: If you already own a horse, [officers](#) and [social media](#) are great places to start. If you decide to [come out to an SCA event or practice](#) with your horse, you will find it is much like any other horse club with the exceptions: we have a high percentage of adult beginners, we ask folks to make an attempt at pre-1600s attire, and we handle weapons.

Because of the adult beginners on loaner horses, the rental horses, and the weapons, we have an authorization process in which our safety officers (Marshals) watch you ride and demonstrate safe weapons handling before we allow you to participate un-supervised. If you let the event organizer (autocrat) know you are coming, they will make sure to have someone prepared to authorize you. Also there can be loaner clothing available for you to borrow if you give someone a heads up.

Our rule book is available [here](#).

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Q: My group/area/principality does not seem to advertise practices--as a newcomer, who do I talk to?

A: Contact your Kingdom or Principality Equestrian Officer:

West Kingdom Equestrian Officer - equestrian@westkingom.org

Mists Principality Equestrian Officer – equestrian@mist.westkingom.org

Cynaguan Principality Equestrian Officer – equestrian@cynagua.westkingdom.org

Oerthan Principality Equestrian Officer – equestrian@oertha.westkingdom.org

Or check out the [Equestrian Events and Practices Database](#).

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Q: Is there a mentor/buddy system in place for SCA equestrians?

A: There is no formal mentor/buddy system but there are some recognized groups of experts that might provide training. Additionally, we have many knowledgeable folks willing to share what they know with anyone who cares to listen. Some of our individual participants take on personal students in private relationships.

The first recognized group is our equestrian marshals. These individuals serve as our safety officers. Although the individual rider is always ultimately responsible for their own safety, the marshals inspect weapons, arrange events, supervise new riders, and authorize safe riders. Sometimes individual marshals share expertise when they teach classes or as they go about their jobs at events and practices.

The Order of the Western Gold Scarf is composed of individuals recognized by the Crown as “those who excel in the practice, study, and teaching of the equestrian arts of peace and/or of war. Members of the order serve as exemplars of the West Kingdom's equestrian might and earn the title of ‘Rider of the West’. The token of membership in this order is a gold scarf bearing a white demi-sun.” Members of this Order swear “to teach the equestrian arts to any person found honorable, trustworthy, and noble”.

On a less formal basis, our group is filled with [individuals with extensive amounts of horse knowledge](#). All equestrians are encouraged to share what they know and to listen to the thoughts of others. Some choose to do so at events and practices. Others prefer a more personal relationship and will take on students who exchange labor for horse time and instruction.

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Q: What is the infrastructure/process for getting people without their own horses authorized and involved?

A: On many levels, this process is the same whether folks own horses or not. For getting involved, show up and ask questions. For getting authorized, learn to do an activity safely and then find a Senior Marshal to run you through an authorization. The learning, the doing, and the riding take a little different planning if you are not a horse owner. The SCA Inc can never own, loan, or rent horses, but there are [private individuals](#) and

[vendors](#) that can help you meet your goals.

Option 1: If you want to be absolutely guaranteed of having a horse to ride, your best option is to rent a horse. For some events, the Eq Autocrat or EqMiC has already arranged with a wrangler to make rental horses available. Read event copy or check with organizers directly to see if they have already made arrangements. If they have not, feel free to volunteer to contact wranglers and set up rentals. If you have arranged for rentals and would like to have others participate, share the information with the organizer and encourage them to include that information in their event announcements. If not, we have several rental vendors we have used in the past and experienced equestrians may have suggestions. If you need to know where to start, just ask.

Option 2: Sometimes private horse owners are willing to loan out their personal horses for short periods of time. Sometimes they will even bring spare horses to events or practices for others to ride. Other times, owners arrange to have a loaner pool so that many folks can get a chance to ride. More commonly it is a private arrangement between the horse owner and the borrower. If you borrow a horse, make sure you communicate in advance about the owner's expectations. Some folks want some labor, others would like some cash to offset expenses like diesel fuel and haul-in fees. If it is a pool arrangement, owners may encourage a donation to be split among the expenses of all the horses in a pool.

Do: [Get to know individual equestrians](#) – horse owners are more likely to loan to someone they know. Help out at an equestrian event – many horse owners like to reward the ground crew by letting them ride horses at the end of the day. [Learn to be self-sufficient](#) – passing a horse off to a knowledgeable rider is easy while supervising a complete beginner usually means setting aside the owner's personal riding goals for the day. [Volunteer to arrange for rentals](#). Take advantage of rentals when available – if no one is renting, event after event, organizers stop finding rentals.

Don't: Be upset when loaner horses are not available or not co-operating. Loan-able horses are frequently outnumbered by the number of individuals that would like to borrow them. Horse owners always have the final say in loaning their horses out.

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Q: I have never touched a horse but they are so beautiful and majestic and I would like to learn. What do I do?

A: If you want a chance to pet a horse, come by the barns at an event or come out to a practice. Talk to the owners. Many are more than willing to let you pet their horses and some even have treats you can feed them. Look for "Meet and Greets" and "Horse 101/102" classes in event advertisements. These are designed for you to get a little basic horse experience and may include activities like grooming. Be prepared to sign the waiver. Speak up so folks know you are there and looking to learn more about horses. Don't be surprised if it takes a few minutes to get the attention of a rider who is in the middle of working with a horse. Be patient – they will be delighted to share with you when they finish their task. If you are under 18, be prepared to have a parent or guardian come with you and stay if needed. If all these ideas sound like a great start, try the suggestions [here](#). Remember horse people are people, just like anyone else. Sometimes you might catch us on a bad day, but in general, we love to share when the moment is right.

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Q: I don't own a horse - how can I ride?

A: There are several options. Some assume you already know how to tack, groom, and ride. Others include getting professional instruction.

Some events and practices have [rental horses](#). Rental horses are the best option of guaranteed riding time for folks that do not own a horse. You will need to have some base level of riding skill. Occasionally, there may be access to [loaner horses](#). If you want to ride extensively on loaner horses, most owners will want you to have some base level of riding skill and horsemanship knowledge so that you help in the process. On rare occasions, some owners will give brief, one time pony rides to horseless newcomers who are particularly helpful, but that is not always an option.

Most practices are set up to provide some level of introduction to horses and riding, but are not are not well designed to take someone from complete beginner to competent rider with no other instruction or riding time. If you are a beginner, it is good to seek out a [mentoring](#) relationship or to obtain professional instruction. Many experts recommend that beginners have some form of weekly supervised riding and practice 2-3 days a week if they want to see real improvement in their skills. [Equestrians](#) in your area can usually suggest professional programs with lesson horses tailored for beginners. [Social media](#) is a great place to ask for references.

Riders with more experience can benefit from monthly practices and semi-annual workshops to improve their general horsemanship and SCA specific skills. Most experienced riders continue to take lessons and ride several days a week to maintain competency.

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Q: I don't ride but my husband/wife/child does - what can I do at the event?

A: Some events are focused solely on horses. At others we incorporate activities from other communities such as cooks or archers. At still others, there are full SCA events happening in conjunction with equestrian activities. Even at equestrian focused events there are a host of activities that don't involve riding.

Horses were everywhere in the medieval world and even in our modern times riding is not a prerequisite for interaction and participation. Many times there are unmounted classes. There is always a need for ground crew – one does not need to be a horse person to help out. We will train you in any needed skills. Most importantly Equestrian activities make fantastic spectator sports – much like Lady Gaga, horses live for the applause.

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Q: I ride but my husband/wife/child only fights - is there fighting at EQ events?

A: Sometimes equestrians have events by themselves. Other times we meet with another interest group or as a sub-portion of a much larger event like a Crown Tournament, Coronation, or a War. Watch event copy to see what other activities are planned or ask event organizers.

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Q: What is there for kids who do not ride to do at events?

A: It depends a bit on age and ability, but many of the options [open to adults who do not ride](#) are open to children as well. Young children may need direct adult supervision while older minors may be able to

participate independently. Adults should check with marshals and/or other equestrians before leaving a child unattended in the barn area.

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Q: I want to do stuff with horses, what would be expected of me? (Money, time, etc)

A: Expectations vary with the activity. For petting, spectating, etc. - sign the waiver and follow the instructions of the marshals/horse owner. Cost is basically nothing beyond site fees and whatever time you spend spectating or petting. As you explore more complex interactions with horses, the costs increase. Riding may mean a substantial commitment in terms of money and time.

[Rental](#) horses can run from \$30-50/hour for lessons to \$100-200/day for events. Time commitment with rental horses is minimal as the wrangler handles most care.

Owning or leasing horses is another option. Leasing involves paying some or all of the up-keep on a horse in exchange for riding time. Leasing may involve access to tack or you may be expected to supply your own. Some leased horses must remain at specific facilities. Others can live at your favorite barn and/or travel to events. Full maintenance of a horse costs about \$1500-\$10,000/year depending on your geography and preferences.

[Loaner](#) horses are sometimes another option. Costs vary widely and are best discussed with the individual owners. Some owners would like help covering haul-in or stabling fees. Others would like re-imbursement for fuel. Others want some sweat equity in terms of set-up, tear down, or tack maintenance. The one universal seems to be that owners want to be treated with respect when they offer the gift of their horse and their time. Many owners love sharing their horse with someone that loves that horse as much as they do.

There are three expectations we try to foster in all equestrians – endeavor to enjoy yourself, learn something, and share what you learn with others.

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Q: How do I know if loaner/shared horses will be at a specific practice or event?

A: As much as possible, organizers try to include that information in places like Facebook event pages and on-line event announcements. There is also a space for that information in the [event and practice database](#). If you don't see it listed any of those places and you really want to be sure, it is always ok to ask the organizer. It is also ok to [talk to a friend that owns horses](#) and make private arrangements with them or to [volunteer to arrange for rentals](#).

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Q: I have very little riding experience/haven't ridden in many many years, will I be able to participate/learn in activities at practices and events?

A: Participate/learn – absolutely. Ride – maybe. Horses were everywhere in the medieval world and even in our modern times riding is not a prerequisite for interaction and participation. Many times there are unmounted classes. There is always a need for ground crew – one does not need to be a horse person to help out. We will train you in any needed skills. Most importantly Equestrian activities make fantastic spectator sports.

The biggest barrier to riding is access to horses. For the horseless of all skill levels, [rentals](#) are one option. [Loaner](#) horses are sometimes another.

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Q: Will someone be able to work with me on getting better at riding?

A: Equestrians love to share their opinions. Many of our practices and workshops have volunteers who have specifically set aside their time for the day to teach and help folks improve in their riding. Events called Equestriums are centered on learning about horses. They are loaded with classes for you and your horse. We maintain a [list of potential teachers](#) including what subject areas they feel comfortable covering. We also fundraise and bring in outside experts to teach on topics of interest.

While our programs allow many chances to improve your skills, most riders will tell you there is no substitute for on-going, professional instruction. As individuals we regularly share clinic opportunities, educational articles, and YouTube videos in our on-line communities on [Facebook](#) and [Yahoo](#). Many of our participants have experience with professional instructors from a range of disciplines and a variety of geographic areas. Each of us would love a chance to tell you why our instructor is your best option.

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Q: Do I need to have my own weapons and equipment?

A: Most of the time you can borrow weapons and equipment, especially when you are starting out. Many folks like to try an activity once or twice before committing to buy or make equipment. With interest, many folks decide to begin [building their own weapons and equipment](#) so they can be assured of having items that fit their personal preferences.

To facilitating planning for organizers, we maintain a [database of equipment](#) that is available to be loaned out for events and practices. Some of this equipment is owned by Kingdom. Other pieces belong to private individuals.

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Q: How do I get started making gear or where can I buy what's needed?

A: The [West Kingdom Equestrian Arts webpage](#) has several education documents, including ones on equipment construction. Also your fellow equestrians have faced many of the same problems and are likely to have specific suggestions on construction and purchasing. Asking around on [social media](#) is one place to start. Other great options include going to [events and practices](#), taking classes, getting copies of handouts, or listening to the advice of those who have already solved these problems.

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Q: What kind of horse activities are done in the SCA?

A: Any safe activity is fair game. We strive to emulate pre-1600 skills and activities. The most showy and obvious is jousting, but horses impacted all levels of medieval life.

We have two forms of jousting – foam tip and wooden tip. Both forms involve armor, riding directly at opponents in the list, and having breakable tips. Foam is a little more forgiving and is open to anyone who can pass an authorization. Wooden is an experimental program that requires more armor and training. Neither program is designed to cause un-horsings. But as all riders know, falling can be a part of all forms of riding. We also have two forms of mounted sparring. Crest combat is a simulation of the medieval game of bastons in which riders used cudgels to knock elaborate crests off of their opponents' helms. In addition, we have armored combat with padded rattan swords. Some of our members work through medieval fighting manuals exploring wrestling and sword "plays" in a scholarly fashion. There are many surviving texts that describe how to fight from horseback.

We play a variety of mounted games with weapons - ring spearing, hitting the quintain, javelin throwing, tent pegging, vegetable cutting, or reed cutting. Many of these games were designed to teach medieval combat skills. We ride against the clock or in head-to-head match races. We also tackle challenge courses akin to Working Equitation or Cowboy Challenge Racing. We practice close quarters riding with tag, horse soccer, bushkazi, or pato. We target stationary and moving objects in the mounted archery program. We even conduct elaborate mock hunts. Medieval hunting was a pastime enjoyed by both men and women. We have mounted mock stag hunts which promote enjoyable cross country rides. We have several members that drive and incorporate that skill into our activities. We process on horseback during "State" occasions to promote the Medieval horse, the exploration of Calvary drills, and the practice of formation riding.

The wealth of activities creates an almost infinite array of possibilities. Do you have an idea not listed? Speak up and [let your fellow equestrians know](#). We are always game to try something new.

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Q: Do I need to ride in a specific style to participate?

A: Any safe and humane style is permitted. We have riders from all backgrounds, in all kinds of saddles. Most participants ride in a modern saddle. Some construct and use period inspired tack. A few skip the saddle entirely.

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Q: How do I get a practice started near me?

A: Equestrian practices are mini-events in terms of most regulations. All you need is a venue, a marshal, a sponsoring branch, [a warning sign](#), [waivers](#), and an [insurance certificate](#). There are more detailed descriptions of requirements on page 8 of the [Society Equestrian Handbook](#). Practices differ from events in insurance regulations. All the practices at a single venue, for the entire year, go on one insurance certificate. Each event requires its own certificate. If you start up a practice, let the [KEO](#) know. You should submit the dates using the [practice database submission form](#). After the practice is over, the marshal must write a practice report within ten days. The [report template](#) is available on-line.