

Horse Training: Trail Riding

Personal Project 2020-21

Santa Clarita Valley International Charter School

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Horse Training: Trail Riding

Introduction

The Personal Project is a year long project where we choose one of our interests and create a goal based off of it to complete by the end of the project. The purpose of the 10th grade personal project, in my opinion, is to further explore our interests or find a new interest. I think it is used as an opportunity to have us all start thinking of careers and interests we might pursue after high school. It also not only used for finding our interests but also furthering other skills that we will need in the future, like, time management, independence, etc. I had some prior information on this project from my sister, who did this project a year before me, and had a lot of time to think about what I wanted to do. I came into this project pretty excited and full of ideas. I get stressed easily so this project was not helpful in helping me with that area, but I have found that it helps to take it one step at a time.

Some of my interests that I was thinking about creating my project around is sewing, roller skating, reading, and, the one I chose, horses/ horseback riding. I was originally going to do my project on sewing clothes and donating them to a charity, but it ended up not being realistic under the circumstances that I had. There were many problems that came up when I looked into the sewing project further, including, cost, getting resources, etc. I ended up choosing horses/ horseback riding because I have two horses and spend a lot of time at the barn anyways. It was the most practical choice and it is something that I definitely enjoy doing.

My topic is horses horse training. My goal is to have my two horses, Ashkar and Rockstar, go on a successful trail ride with my sister and I. My driving question is, “How can I retrain my horses to trail ride and document the journey?” My final product is to create a blog to showcase the process of training my horses to trail ride. I made a website to show my blogs and photos. My topic is viewed through the Global Context of Fairness and Development. It falls

under this because this Global Context deals with other living things and how relationships work between us and them. Working with and riding horses depends on creating a relationship with your horse too, which this Global Context expresses. My topic is viewed through the Area of Interaction of Approaches to Learning. It falls under this because I am learning and teaching a new subject, which would essentially be training the horses but specifically trail riding. It would also be this because I am providing information on horses/horse care and as one of the parts of Approaches to Learning questions, “How do I communicate my understanding?” I am doing this by creating a blog.

Investigating

Prior Knowledge

I have been horseback riding for five years, since I was 11. My sister and I started at a summer camp that was based around horseback riding, horses, and farm animals. I rode my first horse there. About one year into that camp, we started to lease a horse and had him at that barn for a part of the time and then moved up the street to a new barn. We stopped leasing him and soon after we bought our first horse, Rockstar. Then we bought our second horse, Ashkar, about two years after him. They are both boarded at the second barn I mentioned. Through this entire time we had the same trainer teaching us. We finally realized, when we had Ashkar and Rockstar, that our trainers teaching methods were not something we wanted to use anymore and switched trainers. This switch took quite a long time because, as we were still new to this, we weren't aware of any other better options and ways. We got our newest trainer, Jan, about seven months ago. This has been a great switch and all around the horses, and us, are happier.

Although I have been working with horses and riding them for four years, some of the information that I was taught is not something that I would use again. With this, I needed to be retaught in a way that both Ashkar and I enjoy. Some of the knowledge that I knew is helpful to

me now but a lot of the riding and training I needed to relearn. Luckily, I have been able to learn our new methods quite quickly. I did know quite a bit about riding starting this project, but I would say that this did hinder my project slightly, especially since I started training with Jan right as we started this project.

Research/Literature Review

The history of horses, and horseback riding, dates back to “[...] around 50 million years to an animal called Hyracotherium, which is native to North America” (Admin, 2020). Horses evolved over hundreds of years to become the many breeds and sizes known today, and originally wandered around earth untamed. “It’s believed that horseback riding started around 4500 BC” (Admin, 2020). Horses, when domesticated, were used for helping different cultures with what was most needed in each, commonly chariot driving in the early ages. “Cavalry were very often a determining factor in winning the strategic battles which changed the course of history [...]. Horses have helped mankind in other ways besides warfare, travel and transport [...]. Another very useful task for which horses are exceptionally well adapted and which they often enjoy is working livestock” (Equitours, 2014). Horseback riding has evolved very much, so that horseback riding now is used mostly for pleasure riding in either Western or English, or for competitions. “The Western riding style is believed to have come to life in the mid-1600s in the Southwestern United States and northern Mexico” (Admin, 2020). Riding has progressed to where different riding categories have emerged whether riding in the arena or out on roads and trails. Essentially, trail riding and hacking are the same thing too, where hacking is commonly said in the UK and trail riding in the US. Society has caused horses to make major changes and everyone is still learning how to understand horses better.

Horseback riding, and specifically trail riding, is important for a few different reasons and comes with many benefits. Horseback riding “exercises the mind” and “increases muscle tone

and strength” (Cramer Quarter Horses, 2018). Along with many other benefits, these two are the most prominent out of them all. When riding, the riders tasks are to “[...] communicate with your horse, execute movements, and overcome obstacles” (Cramer Quarter Horses, 2018). All of these tasks involve the riders mind working to not only control the horse but also themselves.

Horseback riding is great for a persons mental state and can also be beneficial to a persons physical state too. “Even when not on the horse, riders are likely to engage in demanding physical activity around the stables. Mucking out stalls, carrying tack, and grooming horses increases muscle tone and strength” (Cramer Quarter Horses, 2018). Horse riding, in general, has many benefits, and trail riding is no different. Trail riding can include “creating a unique social environment for friends to spend time with one another” and “ enjoy[ing] your horse as you explore nature together!” (Emily, 2014). Trail riding comes with many more benefits to both the rider and the horse as they have to work together to ride through other obstacles and distractions they normally wouldn’t have in an arena. Trail riding is important because it “helps horses recover quicker from distractions, better negotiate obstacles, and improve their conditioning” and helps the rider with “improved balance, strength, and stamina” (Emily, 2014). Also, trail riding is important to save trails that riders and hikers both use and preserve as much nature as possible. “Are the trails where you ride in danger of being developed? [...] an army of help can facilitate a dialogue with your local government authorities about sponsoring and maintaining the trails you frequent” (Trailrider, 2007). Trail riding is important to not just equestrians, although it is very beneficial for them, but other communities that can be affected by the same trails.

Training a horse to trail ride can take some time, more so if it is a spooky horse. Spooking is a major issue that can effect the horse and rider while on a trail ride. A lot of the training used when working in an arena can be used out on trail too but, because of the extra obstacles and the new environment, some new techniques will most likely need to be applied. It

is important, especially on a trail, to be aware of the horse and surroundings at all times. “[...] accidents can and do happen, [...] it’s how we react and address these eventualities that will determine the outcome of the rest of the ride and whether or not you’ll ride or walk back to the trailhead” (Conrad, 2019). There are different ways to train a horse to go on trails, it is up to the rider to find what fits best for them and their horse. A spooky horse, a horse that gets frightened easily and can be quite jumpy, will need some extra help from the rider in order to get through a trail ride. Being a leader for the horse and having the horse’s trust are important when dealing with spooking. “Monitor your own body language”, “Stay calm when your horse spooks”, “Redirect your horse’s attention by changing his focus”, “Get him to move his feet”, and “When you feel him start to relax, reward him” (AQHA, 2018). These are a few tips in helping the horse to get past anything they may be scared of. “The habit I want to reinforce is to go past or through anything without stopping to look at it [...] If you let a horse look at things, then you are teaching him to be afraid of everything that is new and telling him that things should be looked at instead of ignored. You are not telling him that it is OK to go right past it” (Cherie, 2016). As long as the rider is relaxed, the horse should then feed off of that energy, and this can make any issues that can occur easier to control. Training a horse to trail ride will take some time since there are so many new experiences the horse will go through, but it is worth it to be able to spend some time with the horse and the trails.

Trail riding can be a fun experience for both riding a horse and exploring nature, but can also come with its dangers. There are certain safety precautions that need to be taken when horseback riding. Many people don’t consider the importance of taking these necessary precautions for riding, in general, but also going out on trail, especially when going alone. Wearing a helmet is very important when riding, and although some people don’t agree with wearing a helmet, the injuries that can occur, with or without one, from a fall can be very serious.

“The Equestrian Medical Safety Association (EMSA) states that head injuries account for approximately 60% of deaths resulting from equestrian accidents” (Trailrider, 2010). Although this one is for both arena work and trail riding, there are some that are more specific to trail riding. “Stay on designated roads, trails and other areas open to horses [...] Carry water and emergency supplies even on short trips [...] Check the weather forecast for your destination. Plan clothing, equipment and supplies accordingly” (Horses, 2019). It is important to be familiar with the trails, or have a map of the trails beforehand, in order to stay safe and keep the problems that could occur to a minimum. A first aid kit can be very essential, even for a short trail, in case of any emergencies. Safety is something that is very important to consider when trail riding, and it is always smart to go with another rider, or let someone know where you are going, before going out. As long as the rider is aware of how to handle any potential dangerous situations, trails can be a very fun and relaxing activity.

Planning

My driving question was, “How can I retrain my horses to trail ride and document the journey?” and my goal for this project was to create a blog to showcase my progress in teaching my horses, Ashkar and Rockstar, to trail ride. For the trail ride, my goal was to take them from my barn to a bus stop about half a mile away. I wanted to be able to ride them the whole way without having any complications, such as, having to jump off, either of them bolting, etc... I had to make a decision to work with either Rockstar or Ashkar, Rockstar was more of a project when it came to trail riding but so is Ashkar. My plan at the beginning was to talk with my trainer, Jan, about my goal to trail ride them and then start recording and blogging my rides. I was going to begin my website on Wix and start to write out my blogs. There was no real schedule for I created but because I go up everyday that was left up for me to decide later. The change in trainers came with a change in training methods too and because of the timing that this

took place, Ashkar and I had to learn the new method quite quickly so that I could complete this project. Luckily, Ashkar and I are pretty quick learners and both perfectionists.

From previous experience, I went on quite a few trails but it wasn't a specific skill that I worked on. I knew basic techniques as the rider on how to trail ride but didn't have much information on how to control a horse, other than a lesson horse, on trail. I realized that we needed to start off slow and that I needed to learn and research more. Most of the training methods that I used on the trail rides I learned from Jan. She taught Ashkar and I almost everything that I know and use now on trail. Ashkar is a pretty skittish horse so Jan first taught me that it is important that I be the leader and calm any of my anxieties when I am on trail with her, along with many other things. I also researched by looking at some different training videos and reading magazines specialized in trail rides/ trail ride training. There are many videos on the internet that show off different techniques and I found some reliable ones that I used. I also went on trails sometimes with the other ladies up at the barn so some of my training I learned from them. To create a high quality project, I wanted to make a website so that I could display all the knowledge I learned and also include my blog. I didn't have a specific way that I wanted my blogs to look so I left that open to be changed as I went on. I also went on trail as much as I could so that Ashkar and I could complete this project successfully. I wanted my project to also educate my viewers on horses, especially Ashkar and Rockstar. When I began, I had a brief outline for my final product and, as I went along, I worked to refine it.

Taking Action

To complete my final product, I first started off with deciding which horse I would work with for the trail ride training. I was leaning towards working with Rockstar, who is our younger and more untrained horse in that area. When we first started with Jan, to begin training, I chose to work with Ashkar more closely and Abigail chose Rockstar. It made more sense for me to

work with Ashkar for this project too so I trained her and Abigail brought Rockstar along sometimes too. Next, I just began going on trail rides, first leading and then moved up to riding, and recording the trips. I also recording Abigail and I making their buckets, cleaning the stalls, etc. I worked on my website and played around with how I would create my blog and create it as a whole. I started with creating a few different tabs that I could change later but started as a basis. I have many videos and photos but as I took them I didn't start blogging them until later. I decided to get the videos that I would blog about later and wait to write them. Later into this project, I began helping someone at our barn turnout their horse and train them a little bit which, in terms of my training, helped me learn more.

I didn't have to make any big changes to my project throughout it. I left some of the aspects of my project open to be decided later so, while they were decided on as I continued, there weren't any changes. I used my phone for recoding and Abigail did most of it too. She told me multiple times that I should get a go-pro type device but I ended up continuing to use the phone, which could have been a big change if I got the device. I didn't make any changes to my plan either. Since I am working with a horse, she had some good weeks and some bad weeks on trail. We made progress overall though. I also didn't work on trail riding with Jan as much either, our lessons were mostly arena work, but I did go on a trail with her and Abigail towards the end of my project. Also, Abigail ended up joining us, riding Rockstar, on our trail ride to the bus stop so it was a bonus for both horses to go out, since my original plan was just Ashkar.

I did accomplish my project, and getting Rockstar out on trail too was a plus. Since there is so many different aspects on trail, I will constantly have to be training and learning but my goal for this project was accomplished. Working with Ashkar on both trails and arena work has been a huge help to bonding us, which has greatly improved her skittishness. Because of how many times we have been to the bus stop, we should be ready to go further and keep moving

forward. Since I had a certain time limit on this project, and Jan training us, Ashkar and I have made amazing progress and have both learned so much.

Reflection

Evaluation of Product

When I started this project, I didn't have a very clear plan or vision for how I wanted my final product to look, I had a brief idea though. My product, I feel, is of high quality. I struggled with trying to create a project that looked professional and be the best it could be. I have very high expectations for myself so it took me quite some time to try to finish each part of my project. I think that I did a lot of work and it is of high quality. I was lucky to have a great mentor, Jan, so if I ever had a struggle with Ashkar I could text her or talk to her at our lesson. If I had a struggle with creating my final product, I was, most of the time, able to figure it out by myself and didn't have that many struggles with completing it either. If I had another opportunity to do this project, I would have worked on my time management more. I enjoyed working on my project with my topic choice and choosing my mentor. I think the only big part that could have been improved was my time management. I didn't work with a schedule to get it done on a timely manner but instead, didn't work on it throughout the week and worked diligently on the weekend. I think if I would have set a better schedule that it would have been done earlier and wouldn't have caused as much stress as it did. I personally like how my project turned out other than that.

Reflection on Knowledge, Understanding, and Skills

During this project I learned so much and grew a lot as a person and rider. In only a year, I learned a lot about riding in general and especially trail riding. I am a much better rider than I was before I started this project. I also learned more personal skills including, perseverance, patience, determination, etc... I learned a lot more than I anticipated to since I had such a short

time to complete this. Ashkar and I are both a much better team and learned a lot from each other and Jan. There are always questions that I am going to have about riding and horses though and there is always something new that I can learn, but for now Ashkar and I both have a basis to get us started, with trail riding specifically. There were quite a lot of obstacles that I faced with this project. There was practically something new every week with training Ashkar. To overcome these challenges, I took a step back and tried to determine what was causing the issue and see if I could solve it on my own or I texted/talked with Jan. There was also an obstacle with trail riding after this project had finished that is worth noting. Abigail, Brinley, and I had went on a trail together and Brinley's horse, Dreamer, bolted with her. Rockstar followed Dreamer and both of them bolted, Abigail and Brinley both fell off. Ashkar didn't bolt and had stayed calm the whole time. This was a scary experience for all of us but we are using it to grow and learn. Ashkar had more trail experience then the other two, which helped her stay calm and instead turn to me for guidance. There are always obstacles that are going to occur but it is important to work through them and have determination. I think that I grew a lot as a person in this time, and Ashkar as a horse. We both had so much growth and as long as we are working together, we will continue to grow. I am very pleased with how my project came along and with what I am taking away.

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APPENDIX A

Pictures

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QarmyOcUWAvQYU6EpULTKHMZTQhyOo0odN4lh678MxE/edit>

APPENDIX B

Journals

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jCBKqqpyz0LN7hhURcsCBLOVMj4eW1dvUQ1NZB9aNAk/edit>

APPENDIX C

Mentor Interview

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QJ3oIyrqUmKUsFsYfcVbxI3cTJpZYEzF/view>

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rhY9qumy0xgXlfhkXhbLuk3LkSDoSqKFfennp29nHY/e>
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APPENDIX D

Other Materials

<https://smracek2.wixsite.com/website-1>