

# SORBA Tri-Cities Group Ride Leader Guide

Thank you for your interest in becoming a group ride leader for SORBA Tri-Cities. Our ride calendar is in many ways the heart and soul of the club. After all it's our shared love of riding that is the basis for what we do. In order to provide these opportunities we rely on volunteers like you!

Taking the time to plan and lead a ride is one of the easiest yet most important contributions you can make to our growing mountain biking community. Any current member of SORBA Tri-Cities is eligible to lead a group ride. This guide is intended as a resource to assist you in planning to ensure you have a successful and fun group ride.

## Ride Leader Requirements:

With regard to rules for leading group rides, the club only requires the following:

- Ride Leaders must be a current member of SORBA Tri-Cities.
- Ride Leaders must provide full details of your ride to the SORBA Tri-Cities board so that it can be included in the group ride calendar and other marketing materials. *Details on what information to include are contained in the next section of this document.*
- To ride in a legal and responsible manner that sets an example to other members. This includes appointing an experienced rider to ride at the rear of the group or "Sweep" to ensure no rider is left behind.
- All riders are required to wear a helmet. If a rider shows up and does not have a helmet they cannot participate in the group ride. While you can not physically stop them from riding make it clear that they are not part of the group ride. If this should happen please take a moment to explain the importance of wearing a helmet.
- To take a moment after the ride to email the board with a brief ride report, i.e. how many riders showed up and how did the ride go overall. Having info on our rides helps plan future events/rides.
- HAVE FUN!

## Planning And Posting Your Ride

The first step is deciding when and where you're going to lead your ride.

Since leading a ride may not be the ideal way to learn a new trail system it's best to choose a trail you're already familiar with. Everyone has a favorite way to ride a particular trail, sharing your favorite route is part of what makes leading such a fun experience. When choosing a ride location it's also important to be mindful of recent weather and trail conditions. Some trails are more resilient to wet weather than others and may be ready to ride when others aren't. When

scheduling your ride it's helpful to plan it out as far in advance as possible. This gives you and the ride coordinator plenty of time to advertise your ride and allows people to plan for it. Once you've decided on a time and location all that's left is to send the ride details to the board to post on the calendar and on other media outlets. After your ride has been submitted you should also consider posting a note on the forums on Discord.

- **Description of ride:** Try to describe how long or how many miles you plan to ride. Give details about the route you plan to take and what they might expect. Is this a casual ride with lots of stops? Are lights needed? Extra food? Be descriptive and avoid jargon.
- **Date:** Double check and make sure you have this correct in your email.
- **Pace:** It's important to pick a pace and stick to it as advertised. Advertising a ride as casual and leading a moderate or fast pace is a sure way to alienate new riders. While pace is largely subjective the following is meant to serve as an aid in choosing the pace classification that's right for your ride. You can use the following designations for pace.
  - **Casual:** This is a very casual pace and completely beginner friendly. Someone who has little to no experience on a mountain bike should be able to stay with the group. Casual rides generally have many stops to allow everyone to rest as needed and to regroup. This is the pace often used for kids and beginner rides. The goal is to keep the group together and encourage/assist new riders as needed.
  - **Casual/Moderate:** While still laid back and "casual" in nature this pace will have fewer stops/breaks along the way. Oftentimes stronger riders will lead and attend a casual/moderate pace if the aim of the ride is more social in nature. Riders with an average level of fitness and at least a few months of regular riding under their belts should do fine on this level of ride.
  - **Moderate:** This pace is for the average rider with a season or more of experience under their belt and the desire to push the pace a bit. Riders at this level are often starting to further refine their bike handling skills. While not a race pace moderate rides are considerably faster than casual rides and tend to offer few if any regular rest breaks.
  - **Moderate/Fast:** This pace is intended for the experienced rider who wishes to push themselves above the average pace. These rides will seldom have regular breaks and require a significant level of fitness and bike handling skills in order to stay with the group.
  - **Fast:** This is intended for the "hammer heads" of the club. These rides can and often will be done at a full on race pace. Pushing yourself to your limits is what a fast pace is all about. When in doubt it's better to err on the side of a more casual ride and have fun rather than pushing the pace and splitting your group or dropping riders.
- **Terrain:** Terrain is used to describe the type of trail you'll be riding. For example, is the trail fast and smooth like Winged Deer Park or full of rocks and challenging lines like the Warriors Path State Park? Accurately describing the terrain is perhaps the most crucial part of your ride submission. There's a good chance that you'll have folks who are new to the particular trail considering your ride. It's important attendees know what to expect

so they can make an educated decision as to whether their technical abilities are in line with the type of riding you'll be leading.

You can use the following terrain designations when describing rides.

- **Easier:** An entry-level MTB trail. Minimal obstacles (roots & rocks) on the tread. Most climbs and descents will be gradual.
- **Intermediate:** Assumes the rider has basic MTB skills. There will be obstacles which require the rider to get their front wheel off the ground to clear successfully. Short steep climbs and descents may be encountered. Many intermediate trails may be successfully ridden by more fit entry-level riders.
- **Advanced:** Assumes the rider has mastered fundamental MTB skills. Significant obstacles will be present (rock gardens, large and/or suspended logs, drop-offs). Climbs and descents will be long and/or steep. There may be sections where even experienced riders will need to portage their bikes.
- **Extreme:** A mastery of fundamental MTB skills is required along with good fitness. Slow riding or "trials" skills may be required to "clean" some sections. Areas of trail may be "exposed" (i.e. large drop offs to one or both sides). Even the most skilled and fit rider should expect to portage their bike through sections. Tibet Knob and East Massanutten are examples. •
- **Meeting location and time:** Post a link to driving directions from MTBProject, Trail Forks or Google Maps and specify where the trailhead can be found. Be specific in regards to your meeting place. Trails may have multiple parking lots so be sure to indicate which you'll be using. Describe the vehicle you'll be in and or the bike you ride so riders who may not know you can more easily locate you at the trailhead. It's also helpful to indicate a meeting time and ready-to-ride by time. For example, *meet in the parking lot at 9am ready to ride by 9:30*. Most people have some level of preparation they need to do in the parking lot to ride. Indicating a meeting and departure rides generally means a better chance of your ride leaving in time.
- **Contact name, email and phone:** Be sure and provide accurate contact info in case anyone has any questions or needs to contact you regarding your ride. When emailing the ride coordinator be sure to include all the above information and your ride will be posted quickly. If the ride coordinator should have any questions or need additional info they will contact you to work out the details.
- **Tips On What To Bring:** While not a requirement, the following items are recommended to bring along when leading a ride.
  - Additional Spare Tubes / Patch Kit
  - Extra Food
  - Water
  - A Cell Phone
  - Basic First Aid Kit

## Leading The Ride:

Here are a few basic guidelines to help ensure a successful outing come ride day.

- **Show Up:** Barring horrendous weather or damaging trail conditions that make the decision to ride a no brainer, show up to lead your rides. Remember that people are counting on you to guide their day's adventure. However, the final decision to cancel a ride is always in the hands of the ride leader. If circumstances arise that make it impossible for you to attend, try to find another qualified member to take your place. If this fails, contact the SORBA Tri-Cities board for assistance in finding a replacement leader or canceling if necessary. Please also take the time to post a note in the forums in Discord.
- **What to do if now one shows up:** If you've set up your ride well in advance and have gotten the word out via the forums and or mailing list this is unlikely to happen. If you do find yourself the only rider at the trailhead, wait at least 15 minutes before deciding to make the call to ride solo or cancel. You will still get credit for leading the ride regardless of attendance.
- **Introduce Yourself:** Before heading out on the trails take a moment to introduce yourself. Also take a moment to ask how familiar your riders are with the club. If you have a sizable number unfamiliar with SORBA Tri-Cities take a moment to tell them a bit about the club. For example let them know that in addition to providing these group rides we also maintain the local trails and take a prominent role in local trail advocacy. Be sure to mention the web address so they can get more information.
- **Use the Liability Waivers:** Have each rider sign the liability waiver which can be found at [insert link]. If a rider refuses to sign they unfortunately cannot participate in the group ride. As is the case with folks not wearing a helmet you can not physically prevent them from following however, make it clear they are not included in your group. This waiver is used to protect both the club and you as the ride leader. Please note that there is a separate version for any minors you may have on your ride. After your ride, retain a copy of the liability waiver for yourself and provide the originals to the board of directors.
- **Setting Expectations:** Take a moment to set the proper expectation for your ride. Give an overview of the type of terrain you'll be riding and the pace you plan to keep throughout. Suggest that if anyone wants to go slower or faster on their own, they let you know before splitting off.
- **Designate A Sweeper:** Ask for a volunteer to serve as the sweeper for your ride. The sweeper is a critical part of any successful ride. This individual agrees to ride at the rear of the group and make sure everyone remains with the group during the ride. It's often a good idea as a ride leader to plan ahead and have one of your regular riding buddies present and lined up to sweep for you. Every great ride leader needs an equally great sweeper to be successful. For very large groups 2 way radios are often an effective tool the ride leader and sweeper can use to help keep the group together.

Additionally take a moment to ask all riders to be responsible for the person behind them This means when making a turn or passing a trail intersection you yell out which way you are going. If you do not hear the person behind yell out

the same message to the person behind them, STOP and tell the person in front that you are waiting for the person behind to catch-up. Chances are the person behind is too far back to hear the turn (or someone's fallen or had a flat tire or other mishap). There are few things as demoralizing as being dropped off the back of a group ride. If you and your sweeper are communicating well this will never be an issue on your ride.

- **What To Do If You've Lost A Rider:** Despite everyone's best efforts in staying together this can sometimes occur. If you find you've dropped a rider, stop the group immediately. Oftentimes all a rider needs is a few minutes to catch up to the group. If after giving the rider a 10 minutes or so consider doubling back to look for them. Depending on how far out you are etc. you could either assign an alternate ride leader to continue with the group while you or a small group double back for them or you could have a volunteer who knows the trail or someone else go back while you finish with the group.
- **Stick To Your Advertised Pace:** Be sure to stick to your advertised pace. If you're feeling particularly strong it may be tempting to push the pace a bit. If you're not careful that casual pace you advertised can quickly creep up to moderate and split your group. Be mindful of your pace and ask your riders from time to time how they feel the pace is holding up. Be particularly careful when leading purely Casual rides. These rides typically attract a wide range of riders who vary in both technical skills and fitness levels.

On a casual ride, remember to give the last person to stop at a break enough time to catch their breath as well. There is nothing more demoralizing than to finally catch up with the group, start gasping for air, and then watch them take off again the next second. Casual rides are all about having fun and introducing new folks to the sport. Be sure to keep it fun.

- **Manage Mechanicals/Injuries:** While as the ride leader no one expects you to be a trail side bike mechanic or emt you can help manage the situation if one should arise. If a rider has a mechanical, do your best to assist them and/or find someone in the group who can help if you're not mechanically inclined. In the worst case scenario find someone to accompany the rider out should they need to bail on the ride. No one should have to walk a bike out alone. If someone manages to injure themselves stay calm and work with the group to make sure the rider gets back to the trail head. This may be just walking the rider out and back to their car.

If things are more serious use a cell phone to call 911 for professional help.

- **Keep It Fun:** Just remember these rides are all about getting out with your fellow mountain bike enthusiasts and enjoying the trails! Do your best to maintain a fun and positive atmosphere throughout the ride.

## Post Ride:

Here's a few tips to keep those riders coming back.

- Take a moment to thank the folks who came out for your ride. Making folks feel welcome on our club rides is a sure fire way to recruit new members.
- Make sure everyone has directions and is clear on how to return home.
- Remind those who are not already members to check out the SORBA Tri-Cities website and consider joining.

If you happen to know of any upcoming trail workdays in the area take a moment to mention them to the group as well.

- Consider heading over to a local restaurant for post ride refreshments.
- Please take the time to send an email to the board with a brief summary of how the ride went. How many riders showed up what the conditions were like and so on. Be sure to report any problems you may have had or share any cool stories from the day! This type of information is helpful in planning future events

## Thanks:

Again thank you for your interest in becoming a SORBA Tri-Cities group ride leader. Without our dedicated group or ride leaders we would be unable to provide this invaluable service to the local MTB community. While the information above may seem overwhelming at first glance it's actually far from it. Once you've led a ride or two all the information will become second nature. If you have any questions and or comments please don't hesitate to contact the SORBA Tri-Cities board at [board@sorba-tricities.org](mailto:board@sorba-tricities.org).