

Kiting and Horses

As a keen single line kite flier, and also the owner of several riding horses, I'd like to suggest that you include in your code of conduct some practical advice for kite fliers of all types when coming into contact with horses.

This in my view particularly applies to Power Kiting, Boarding, Buggies and Stunt/Aerobic Kiting because their ground position is often rapidly moving - but also applies to single line kites.

Generally the sites used for kiting (downs, beaches and hillsides) are also popular with horse riders.

Horses are fright and flight animals - with the possible result of a frightened horse (combined weight of c.600 kg and 45mph potential) tearing off taking anything in its path with it - including you and your valuable kiting gear!

Horses are generally unpredictable, fast, and very strong - they also have a brain about the size of a golf ball, and so have even been known to shy at a single plastic carrier bag blowing in the breeze!

There are no reasons why Kite Fliers and Horse Riders should not get along fine if a few guidelines are followed by both parties and so here are some suggestions:

1. Be aware of your environment – and keep a look out for horses approaching.

- Give them plenty of room and try to avoid them!
- 50 Metres is a good guide as a minimum safety distance to avoid any problems.
- If room is limited and it is practical, ground the kite and secure from flapping until any horse has passed.

2. Horse riders should also be trying to avoid you.

- Horse riders want to avoid trouble, but must avoid soft sand or uneven ground.
- The safest pace for a rider to pass you is at walk or trot.
- Horses may approach you quickly:
 - Horses being ridden rarely travel faster than 15 – 20 mph (in Canter)
 - Rarely a ridden beach/downs gallop may approach at up to 30mph
 - Loose horses are much more dangerous and faster!

3. Horses have a limited field of vision – especially behind, overhead and directly in front of them - sudden movement in these areas can lead to a 'spook' and the horse becoming increasingly unmanageable. Horses have an acute ability to detect movement. This is why a horse is much flightier on windy days; things that are normally stationary are now moving and perceived as a potential threat.

- AVOID SUDDEN KITE, INDIVIDUAL, TOWED

OBJECT MOVEMENTS OR SUDDEN CHANGES OF DIRECTION WITHIN 50 M OF ANY HORSE

4. Noise bears a very important part of the horse sensory apparatus, and it is similar in range and tone to that of humans - but far more sensitive. Horses' ears can also rotate about 180 degrees allowing horses to focus on the direction from which the sound is coming, isolate it, and run the other way!

- Sudden bangs, loud rustling noises, line whistle or a kite being stalled or luffed can frighten the horse.
- AVOID STALLING, LUFFING OR BRINGING A KITE TO LOW LEVEL OR GROUND WITHIN 50 M OF ANY HORSE.
- Try and reduce the sound of the kite by reducing load on the line/s and holding in a gentle hover/static flight mode.

5. Riders generally know their horse well and what will spook them or calm them

- Listen to what a rider requests – and advise if possible
- Stay calm and don't run about or panic
- Remember that inanimate objects can always be repaired or replaced – humans or animals can't.

What if it all goes wrong?

Spooked Horse (rider still on board)

- Communicate with rider (they have more of a problem now than you do!)
- Ask how you can help
- Avoid sudden movements or noises
- Minimise Kiting noise or activity
- Stand still at first
- Walk calmly away from horse taking your Kite/s and gear with you

Loose Horse (riderless)

- A horse can change direction very quickly even at full gallop - so unless you know what you are doing – get out of the way!
- If the horse is running directly at you – stand still.
- Be prepared to move if the horse doesn't!
- Don't run, because the horses' herd instinct will be to follow you!
- Locate and help the rider
- Unless you have handled horses before, do not try and catch one – when frightened and/or injured they are likely to bite or kick – especially if cornered.
- Call for help
- Always carry something to cut your lines with – in the case of entanglement.

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