

Trails & Tribulations

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QUICKSAND CAUTION

Quicksand will make many **riverbed** or **flood plain trails** treacherous this winter, until the ground-water table lowers substantially (which may not occur until late spring).

Thanks to January's rains, riverbeds or flood plains were under water long enough to become over-saturated. More wet months are still ahead of us, and many areas are likely to become liquefied enough for quicksand formation.

As surface water sinks, areas will be exposed that may look like regular sand, but they may not be safe. Even experienced riders who know the area can be caught by surprise. **This is not the time for *newbies* to explore the lower trails.**

You don't want to make the five o'clock news, as the DART (Animal Rescue) team attempts to extract your horse from a perilous situation!

What is Quicksand?

The good news is that quicksand is not the monstrous force portrayed in movies or TV. Sinking out of sight into a bottomless pit may be our nightmare, but that's not the way quicksand works. So forget about the image of the cowboy's head disappearing as his flailing hands reach for the rope that his faithful horse, standing on the bank, has tossed to him.

Quicksand is just sand that has been over-saturated with water, creating a mixture that no longer supports weight. **Quicksand won't suck you down**, and it is rarely more than a few feet deep. However, you can trap yourself, if you don't know how to respond. Thrashing vertical movements will force you deeper. Slow, steady movements are best.

"That's fine for me," you might be thinking. "But what about my horse? Try telling HIM to stay calm!"

Well, that is exactly what you need to do. Our horses look to us for leadership. If we remain calm, it increases the likelihood that they will remain calm.



Trails Turn Unfamiliar During Storms... and Afterwards

Liquefaction can occur anywhere conditions allow. When these waters go down, pockets of quicksand will have formed along otherwise familiar trails.

Tips for Navigating Wet Winter Trails

Stay on high ground.

Use trails that are well-traveled and show hoof-prints. If others have passed safely (and you can see from their tracks how deep they sank) then you probably can, too.

Avoid places which appear smooth & trackless. Liquefied sand doesn't hold hoofprints.

When crossing water, look at BOTH banks – are other hoof-prints going into the water and out the other side? How deep are they? ...Any gouge-marks indicating that the riders before you ran into difficulty?

Pay attention to your horse's body language.

They have strong instincts to avoid quicksand and bogs.

If your horse does sink into liquefied sand or bog, DON'T STOP - Keep moving. Standing still allows your horse's legs to sink deeper into resistant suction. If there is solid ground a few feet in front of you, it may be best to keep moving forward. If not, turn towards the nearest solid ground and **KEEP YOUR HORSE MOVING.** As calmly as possible.

Dismount if necessary (to reduce weight) but try to keep your horse moving towards higher ground.