

SBA Ride Guide Manual

The Suwannee Bicycle Association, Inc. (SBA) is a non-profit, membership organization formed to promote environmental awareness and family fitness through bicycling and other outdoor activities in the Suwannee River region. Located in White Springs, Florida, the organization seeks to help people obtain a greater understanding and appreciation of natural ecosystems, history and cultural heritage of the Suwannee River Region. To achieve these purposes, SBA:

- **Conducts trips:** bicycling, canoeing and kayaking, hiking and spring hopping in the region.
- **Maintains a headquarters building** with maps, resource materials and interpretative information.
- **Maintains public bicycle and hiking trails.**

Thank you for volunteering to serve as a Suwannee Bicycle Association Ride Guide! With this position comes some responsibility. The major aim of this responsibility is to ensure that everyone you lead has a safe and great ride. This goal is assured mostly through good common sense.

As a ride guide you serve as a direct representative of the organization; and for this reason (as well as insurance purposes), we ask that all ride guides be current members of the Suwannee Bicycle Association. If you are not a current member, you can download a copy of the membership form or join online at the SBA website (www.suwanneebike.org). In return for your ride guide services during activities and events, generally event coordinators try to budget so you will not have to pay any of the event fees.

Ride Guide Job Descriptions

Primary Ride guides have the major responsibility for organizing the group on designated rides. Primary ride guides present pre-ride information (as discussed in training and outlined in this booklet), insure other guides understand their duties within groups and are final decision makers for groups. These people may vary for each ride during events. All primary ride guides serve as regular ride guides or sweeps before they are selected to be primary leaders.

Ride guides are skilled off-road riders who have been trained by SBA and know at least four areas used by SBA. These people should be able bring groups of people in and out of the woods successfully while insuring all participants ride within their skill levels. They should also understand what to do in case of emergencies and be competent in basic bike repair. Good leadership and decision making skills are a must. Basic first aid training is highly recommended.

Sweeps are ride guides who have been assigned to ride to the rear of groups. This position is extremely important and could potentially be most critical, as there is no back up. Sweeps must not only know the route, but they must be able to show tired riders "bailout" routes. Sweeps must be able to sprint up to inform primary ride guides what is going on in the back. People in these positions should always be the last ones to leave the woods after groups have returned to trailheads.

Categories of Rides

Each SBA event hosting off-road riding will offer three categories of off-road rides. These categories will be designated A, B & “see” rides. The majority of rides offered will be in the B and “See” categories, with at least one in the faster “A” category offered per day. Before riding, primary ride guides will announce the category of the rides (A, B or “See”) and repeat the description of that category. Primary ride guides should try to make sure everyone will be comfortable with the pace and technical level of the ride.

“A” rides: These rides move at very fast pace for long distances. There are very infrequent or no rest breaks during rides. Very limited numbers of ride guides are scheduled for these rides. Riders and ride-guides will not wait for slower riders or those with mechanical problems. Participants on these rides must be able to maintain the pace, read maps, find their way out of the woods and fix mechanical problems encountered on the trail. Only those participants who are confident that they can meet these criteria should participate in “A” rides.

“B” rides: These groups move at brisk pace with occasional rest breaks. The number of ride guides will vary in proportion to the number of participants on the ride. Category “B” groups typically separate on the trail into more than one subgroup based on skills and abilities of riders, with ride guides for each smaller group. These rides are suitable for typical riders who have at least moderate experience and ability.

“See” rides: These rides usually move at slower pace and include many interpretative or rest stops. “See” rides are shorter in distance and focus on exploring areas to discover more about the natural environment and scenic spots along the way. Short hikes may be included to reach points of interest. Attempts will be made to keep numbers of participants and ratios ride-guides to participants relatively low. Participants on these rides can expect to be guided and assisted at all times. These rides are suitable for everyone, including people who are just beginning to off-road ride.

Tips for Conducting Rides

Equipment Needed: All guides’ bicycles should be in top operating condition. It is embarrassing for guides to have to repair their bicycles while on rides. Guides should set the example for safe operations. Always wear helmets. Gloves can cushion falls. Eye protection (glasses or sunglasses) should also be worn. People are looking to guides for leadership. As a minimum, guides should carry tire pump, patch kits, and tire levers. A few small tools for adjustments or universal tools prove handy when in the woods. A chain tool comes in handy quite frequently, as well. You will have to provide all the tools you carry. SBA usually provides very basic first aid kits for cuts and scrapes. All ride guides are encouraged to carry more elaborate personal first aid kits, if they are so inclined. Carry plenty of water — two large water bottles and water packs are recommended, as other riders sometimes run out, and it is useful in emergencies.

Prior to Ride: Ride guides should be at the ride start locations at least 15 minutes before rides start so that ride positions (lead, sag, sweep) can be designated and to answer participant questions. Guides will need to assure all arriving riders that they are at the proper ride start area.

If ride guides must attend briefings or meetings just before ride start, they should arrive at the meetings ready to ride. Do not put yourself in a position of having to either miss part of a briefing

or being late for the ride in order to get ready. Primary ride guides should begin introductions, letting the group know they are in charge. Introduce all associate ride guides; let riders know they are also trained and are there to help. Encourage all the riders to introduce themselves with first names and hometowns. Try to build sense of confidence in ride guides as well as group solidarity.

Reiterate the name of the ride you will be leading and the designated pace. Describe the ride. Identify the category of ride as A, B or "See" and describe what that means, i.e. how the ride will be conducted. Give anyone who does not feel that they are on the proper ride (i.e. if they will not be able to keep pace or be self sufficient on A or high end B rides) opportunity to leave gracefully. Insure that each rider has a sufficient amount of water for the ride and some energy food if the ride will take over an hour and a half. Make sure everyone has maps or knows that they are available, usually in event packets. Make sure everyone has helmets. Wearing helmets is required on all SBA rides. If any rider does not have a helmet, offer use of a loaner helmet stored at SBA headquarters. Don't get involved in debate about wearing helmets, they will not be permitted to ride. Make sure everyone knows how to properly wear helmets with straps snug, properly going around ears, and correctly positioned on the head.

Have riders check their own bicycles to ensure, among other things, that:

- Brakes are properly working and cables are in good condition.
- Tires are properly inflated and in good condition.
- Handlebars and seats are not loose.
- Shifters are working and cables are in good condition.

The five-step, quick check is a good routine, and has been provided on page 13.

Discretely make sure riders are registered for the event. This check can usually be done by observing wrist bands or other form of event registration marking. If someone is not wearing registration markings, delicately ask if they have registered. If anyone has not registered, kindly ask them to please do so. We cannot let unregistered riders go along for liability reasons.

Drive to Ride Starts: Make sure all of the above tasks are completed before leaving meeting places. You do not want to be many miles down the road at the trailhead, when you discover someone is on the wrong ride, has brought no water, has no helmet or some other problem. Make sure everyone knows how to get to the trailhead on "drive to" rides. Plan on traveling in a caravan. As you pull out, count the number of cars. Keep track of all cars, by count, as you make each corner during the drive. It is best to have other ride guides drive sweep or midpoint positions, especially if a large number of cars is in the caravan.

Many rides in White Springs begin with a short ride on the road. Explain that we must obey all traffic laws. The White Springs Police Department has been supportive of our activities but insists that all cyclists obey traffic laws. Be aware that police have stopped riders during events, especially if night riding without lights or riding two abreast when traffic is approaching.

Just Before Starting Rides: Count the number of riders on the ride just as the ride starts. Then tell everyone how many are in the group. This information is important for associate ride guides, as well. Keep track of anyone who drops out. Count riders as the ride finishes to account for everyone. Remind riders not to follow too closely (10 to 20 feet apart) in case any rider has a spill. This policy is especially important on downhill sections.

During Rides: Attempt to determine the ability and speed of riders as the ride begins. Maintain the pace of the group to fit with the abilities and desires of the majority of the group, not your own. It is better that the ride pace be slightly too slow than slightly too fast.

Resist any temptation to ride with friends ahead of the group and then stop and wait for the group to catch up. While SBA wants ride guides to have fun, all must remember their responsibilities to lead groups and maximize everyone's enjoyment of the ride.

Pace of Rides: Frequently some riders will push the pace to "test" others, consciously or unconsciously, challenging them to keep up. Usually, nothing is said, but the actions speak loudly! This behavior is acceptable for "A" rides. However, this behavior is not appropriate for "B" rides. When rides become competitive, there will be winners and losers. Losers don't have much fun and therefore don't return. Don't let this behavior happen on your ride. Keep "B" rides noncompetitive!

Sometimes groups must navigate through or over obstacles that require slow progress or single file passage. Example situations are walking through sensitive environments or lifting bikes over logs or closed gates. When clear of obstacles or areas, move far enough away for others to wait. Hold the group until the last rider has cleared the slow point and is ready to go. Otherwise, the first riders may get too far ahead of the last of the group, forcing them to sprint to catch up.

Always remember, riders at the back of the pack may be riding harder than those up front. Riders in the back may be less skillful or physically fit, and they may be behind not just because they are taking it easy. Some may be riding very hard, trying to keep up with those who are cruising along at the front. Allow slower riders time for adequate rest breaks. Don't let groups take off right after slower ones arrive. If ride-guides slow down to wait for riders who have fallen behind, then speed back up, those slower riders may feel abandoned.

Watch exhaustion levels of slower riders in groups. Many people will push themselves too hard trying to keep up, rather than admitting they are riding beyond their abilities. Then they may become exhausted at the farthest distance from any bailout point. Take great efforts to avoid exhausting any riders. They may slow the entire group to a crawl and may not be able to ride out by themselves.

Dealing with different paces is probably the most difficult task ride-guides face. Subtle non-verbal methods work best. Moving to the front of a group and slowing down is very effective. But make sure you can rapidly move to a commanding position at the front. Don't get caught in a race with a faster rider. Sometimes ride-guides must resort to verbal means. Some riders will continually pick up the pace and need to be gently reminded that not everyone can maintain that speed. These occasions are usually times when you need to split the group. Sometimes, splitting the group into several subgroups is best. If there are not guides for each subgroup, simply tell riders where to stop down the trail. This situation is one of the reasons ride guides need to be very knowledgeable about the ride areas. Stay with the slower riders, as they probably need the most help.

Group Drop Method is for Category "B" rides with multiple ride-guides assigned to a large group of participants. Ride guides should follow this method while on the ride to insure successful rides. Each ride guide should seek a subgroup usually defined by similar pace as the ride begins. This sub-grouping will happen naturally and is usually based on skill level or friendship. As the ride proceeds, the ride guide remains with this group.

If for some reason the ride guide needs to communicate with a subgroup ahead, he/she can ride forward but should then wait for or return to the original sub-group. In case poorly marked turns in trails or transitions to other ride areas may confuse riders, each sub-group and ride guide should wait at the decision point until the next subgroup behind has reached this point. The first group then proceeds and this second group waits for the next group. This process continues until the sweep arrives.

Should **mechanical problems** arise, subgroups should remain together until repairs are complete, unless the repair is going to take a long time. Then riders may choose to join another group which passes. Ride guides are not required to be bicycle mechanics. However, it is expected that they have basic knowledge and proper tools for minimal trailside repairs such as changing flat tires. Do not hesitate to ask for help from other riders when needed.

Medical emergencies arise infrequently. If they do happen, do not try to be a doctor. For minor cuts and scrapes, have the injured person administer antiseptic and bandages on themselves. You can provide the water, bandages, etc. to them, but have them nurse themselves. This action prevents any liability later.

If the injury is worse than a minor cut or scrape, check the group to determine if anyone on the ride has training in handling medical emergencies. Administer primary first aid only. Help the injured lie down comfortably as possibly, keeping them still and warm. Try to stop any major bleeding only. Ride guides should combine groups and resources. One guide and any others qualified should combine groups and resources. One guide and any others qualified should stay with injured persons. Never leave the injured! If the injured person cannot be moved, a qualified event participant and ride guide should go for help, while others stay.

Try to have a fairly good idea of where you are at all times and how to exit from the area quickly if a situation develops. Always have a map with you, even if you do not need one. You may want to give it to another in the group if an emergency develops. Always send two or more riders for help. Do not let anyone go alone. Please be aware that ranger stations and agricultural inspection stations have telephones which can be used in emergencies.

If someone needs to cut the route short, try to find someone to escort them back. If this is not possible, take them to someplace where there is a direct route back. Discuss the exit route with them. Review it on the map. Only let them return on their own if you are sure they feel confident. Make sure they have returned to the event site, after the ride. Though guides are leaders, they are not expected to be experts. Be prepared to ask others in the group for help if situations warrant. Group input can be invaluable in solving whatever challenge or situation you may encounter.

After rides return to trailheads, try to keep groups intact for a few minutes, before they disperse. Ask them to talk about the ride...what they especially enjoyed or if there was any room for improvement in trail conditions, group conduct or anything else. Be sure to check in with ride headquarters to let them know the ride has been completed and everyone has safely returned. But most of all, remember to **HAVE FUN!**

Five-step Quick Check

A *short* check on the health of bicycles before embarking on rides is always a good idea. The following procedure should take less than two minutes and catch any major problems on bikes. Each member of your group should check his or her own bike.

1. Check brakes by locking them and rocking bike backward and forward. Check front and back brake cable adjustments. Also check for headset looseness.
2. With brakes locked, rock wheels back and forth laterally, to check for loose cones.
3. Spin *wheels* and watch rims at the brake blocks. Check for wheel trueness and loose or broken spokes. Check for misadjusted or misaligned brake blocks.
4. Check tires for wear — bulges or debris like glass or sand spurs caught in tread.
5. Check for loose nuts and bolts on brake assemblies and derailleur adjustment screws.

IMBA Rules of the Trail

- Plan ahead
- Control your bicycle
- Leave no trace
- Never spook animals
- Always yield trail

SBA Mountain Bike Trail Maps

At our SBA website, we have links to maps, as well as to Google Maps with GPS. If you have a GPS- capable cell phone, you can download any of the trail maps to your phone. Maps and route descriptions can be found at: <http://www.suwanneebike.org/trails.htm>