

Park Patrol



Many cities, counties, and states have large parks where people go to enjoy the outdoors. They may go for a hike in the woods, relax on the green grass of a lawn, or play games. When people work inside all day, getting outside can be very enjoyable. Horses and their riders who patrol these large parks help make sure everyone is safe and no one gets lost.

A Park Patrol Horse

Ari watches the sun come up, stretches, shakes his long mane, and nickers softly. His human partner, Terry, is in the house but hears him and calls out, "Good morning, Ari! How are you?" Ari, whose name means *eagle* in the Icelandic language, is a 20-year-old black and white pinto Icelandic Horse. Since Terry is now awake, Ari knows that breakfast will be coming soon, so he watches the house.

As she feeds him his breakfast, Terry talks to Ari and strokes his neck. Ari has been her friend for ten years, and she enjoys his company. After she puts his food out, she leaves him alone to eat and goes inside to have her own breakfast.

After breakfast, Ari gets a drink and strolls around his corral in Terry's backyard. He watches a bird flying overhead and sniffs the breeze. He's waiting patiently—he knows that Terry will be coming back outside soon to brush him, comb out his mane and tail, check his feet, and then load him in the trailer. Today is a work day, and Ari enjoys the job he and Terry do.

Terry says, "Ari and I are mounted patrol rangers for the city of Poway, in California. There are more than a hundred miles of trails around Lake Poway, and we make sure people don't get lost. We also check to see that people have enough water, and we help them if they need help. We also make sure the trails are safe, that the bridges are sound, and that trees or branches haven't blown down."

In the bags attached to his saddle, Ari carries extra water, clippers for branches, an emergency first aid kit, a cell phone, and other supplies that might be needed. Ari and Terry patrol the park once a week, so Ari gets plenty of time to relax between patrols.

Sometimes Ari and Terry are able to help people. Terry says, "One day a woman fell off her horse and was hurt. She was on the ground and her horse ran off. I called 911 and went off after her horse while someone else stayed with the woman. Ari and I found her horse about half a mile away. When help came for the woman, we told her that her horse would be safe until she could get him, and we took the horse home with us."

Park Patrol Horses Are Special

Not every horse can do this job. Patrol horses must be calm in an emergency and must be steady around strange noises and objects, including strollers, bikes, balloons, fire engines, and motorcycles. Terry says, "Ari loves patrols. He enjoys having kids pet him and he likes to watch the wildlife we see, including deer, foxes, bobcats, and even coyotes."

Terry says, "Having patrol horses like Ari on duty make people feel safer when they are out hiking. Plus, Ari can get me to help faster than I could ever walk."

Many other parks have horse patrols, too. New York City has mounted patrols in several parks, including the huge and famous Central Park, Clove Lakes Park, and Van Cortlandt Park. To be a member of the park patrol, both horses and riders must go through a lot of training. The people need to be good riders, know how to use portable radios, and know the rules that apply to the parks. The horses need to be very well trained and safe around all kinds of sights and sounds, including people, dogs, vehicles, and anything else they might come across in the parks.

