

Pony Express re-enactment postponed

Written by Deb Egenberger
Thursday, 09 June 2011 13:39 -

Dangerous horse virus pushes event from June to August.

The mail is still going to be delivered on horseback between St. Joseph, MO, and Sacramento, CA, this summer.

It's just going to be delayed a few weeks.

For the first time in its 32-year history, the National Pony Express Association (NPEA) has decided to postpone the annual re-enactment of the famous mail ride due to an outbreak of a dangerous equine herpes virus.

"Everyone figures we'd rather be safe than sorry," said Lyle Gronewold of Gothenburg, president of the Nebraska division of the NPEA. "Most of the riders I've talked with think the national organization made the right choice."

Nasty weather, including thunderstorms of various intensity, have not deterred Gronewold from past re-enactments.

Weather hasn't kept most of the other 200 Nebraska riders at home either.

But a highly contagious herpes virus that can be deadly to horses has officials taking a cautious path.

The outbreak of the virus has been traced to an event in Ogden, UT, in early May and has been blamed for a dozen horse deaths in at least nine states.

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Gronewold said all of the Nebraska horses exposed to the virus have been released from the quarantine by the state veterinarian.

“But we ride in eight states and all of the horses in those states have not been released,” he said. “It’s just better not to risk it.”

But officials aren’t willing to scrap the re-ride this summer, just push it back a few weeks.

The event had been scheduled to begin Wednesday (today) putting the re-enactors south of Gothenburg on Friday morning.

Now the re-ride will take off Aug. 17 at St. Joseph, reaching the Kansas-Nebraska border on Aug. 18.

Gronewold said that puts the Pony Express mochila at Midway Ranch south of Gothenburg mid-morning on Friday, Aug. 19.

When choosing a new date, Gronewold said officials tried to look beyond the herpes virus incubation period as well as miss most county fairs, state fairs and school activities.

“You’re never going to hit everyone’s schedule,” he said.

At the same time, Gronewold noted that several events in Nebraska are being cancelled, postponed or moved due to the high water situation.

“With the river the way it is, there might have been some places we couldn’t ride in Nebraska now anyway,” he said. “Maybe it’s a blessing.”

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Roughly 200 of Nebraska's 240 association members plan to ride in the re-enactment that spans 500 miles of the 1,966-mile total route.

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