

# Freizeitreiter und -fahrer

**Vereinigung der Freizeitreiter und -fahrer in Deutschland e. V.**

## **We set standards – also for the future**

There is still a lot to be done. Attempts are made again and again by communities and federal states to modify applicable law to leisure riders' disadvantages. In such cases it is advisable to act quickly and to demonstrate common ground. The worst possible case has been prevented by protests as for example riders' demonstrations in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Germany's capital Berlin, collections of signatures, information in print media about the actual facts and direct talks to local politicians, who turn out to be uninformed quite frequently. The VFD is a powerful and competent union of equestrians representing the members' interests opposite administrations and law makers.

At the same time, however, we take up new challenges:

by involvement in protection of natural environment, sustainability and the preservation of countryside and open areas

by training and instructing children and youngsters not only on horseback and equestrian activities but also for better knowledge of nature life and understanding of animals

by technical participation in tourist riding events and by taking influence in the quality standards of horse keeping and forage



## **How everything started**

1973. Cross country horse riding was in danger to be forbidden by a Federal Forest Law. In three federal states (Nordrhein-Westfalen, Bayern und Schleswig Holstein) restrictive Forest Laws had already been enacted. Only thanks to a small group of far-sighted equestrians this law could be averted. In the public awareness riding was treated as equivalent to high performance sports, competitions and training in equestrian centres. Private people – nowadays called leisure riders - were suddenly confronted with giving up their hobbies. The young journalist of the „Reiter Revue Magazine“ Horst Ritter initiated an action of protest. Soon they were six like-minded people: Ursula Bruns, then editor-in-chief of „Freizeit im Sattel“, Ursula Wu, Dr. Robert Ruhmann, Rudolf Jürgens, Senior forestry officer Manfred Haardt and horse breeder Hans Peek founded the VFD on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1973. A quickly drawn up information booklet and events caused a big rush on memberships. Already in August 1973 the new association counted more than 5000 members.

## **How the VFD came by its name**

Manfred Haardt became the first board-executive after the foundation of the VFD. We owe him the currently used term Leisure Riding. At that time the members were still deliberating on the name of the “newborn”. How to call the trail riders, trek riders and carriage drivers, who wanted to be distinguished from the National Equestrian Federation (FN)? Haardt suggested “Association of Leisure Horse Riders”. The concept was meant to clearly exclude high performance sports and competitions.

During a public hearing on the new Federal Forest Law in Berlin, Manfred Haardt successfully defeated most of the typical arguments against riding, which then and nowadays emerge in discussions: horses damage forest paths and should use fire breaks. After 1973, VFD state and local associations were founded. In 1995 Südtirol was recognised as affiliated association. After the German reunification the eastern states passed restrictive riding laws. As a consequence, riders in the German eastern states united in VFD associations from the early 1990ies on. The VFD must not rest on its laurels, because restrictive regulations emerge at all times from all areas. We need another generation of activists!

## **Your first VFD contact:**

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**The German Experts' Union for  
Horse Trekking, Trail Riding and Driving**