

MAY 09, 2019

USEA Events A-Z: Powder Basin Horse Trials

By Jessica Duffy - USEA Staff



Photo courtesy of Carol Muirhead.

The Powder Basin Horse Trials are held yearly in July at Cam-Plex Equestrian Park in Gillette, Wyoming (Area IX) and offer Introductory through Preliminary levels.

In 1988, Bill and Charlotte Combs ran an ad in the local newspaper inviting anyone interested in English riding to meet them at the local library to discuss forming an English riding club. The response was tremendous, and the Powder Basin English Riding Club was born. Members of the club would meet on the weekends at the

Combs' property to practice.

A few members of the Powder Basin English Riding Club traveled to Casper, Wyoming to compete in the Cowboy State Games, which at the time offered a combined training competition. They returned, full of excitement about this type of competition, and members of the club began traveling to compete at other combined training events, including the Big Horn Horse Trials in Sheridan, Wyoming.



One of the fences on the Training course - the Pump Jacks. Photo courtesy of Carol Muirhead.

When the Cowboy State Games approached the club about hosting the combined training portion of the event in Gillette, they jumped at the chance to create their own cross-country course. With the help of Sally O'Connor, Robin Hahn, Paul Popiel, and Steve Buckman, the cross-country course was created on 80 acres of rolling prairie just east of the Campbell County Cam-Plex Event Center.

When the Cowboy State Games moved back to Casper, the Powder Basin English Riding Club continued to host their own event. The Powder Basin Horse Trials ran for the first time on the fourth weekend in August 1993. Twenty-seven years later, the Powder Basin Horse Trials is still going strong.



Photo courtesy of Carol Muirhead.

Carol Muirhead, the Powder Basin Horse Trials' current organizer, explained that it's been a combination of fresh blood and longtime members that have made the Powder Basin Horse Trials successful over the years. "Teresa and Ian Craig have been with the facility and club from its inception," she recalled. "Teresa ran the event for many years as well as served as club president." Don Gerlach, who passed in 2014, was also a contributor from the beginning. "He was a formidable force behind cross-country jump building and from what I hear quite the character and missed by many."

"Jamie and Gary Gilbert and their family keep the local event spirit alive as active competitors and provide untold hours volunteering to prep courses and organize clinics," Muirhead continued. "Connie and JD McGinnley and their family are also

competitors who provide many hours during events to help repair the cross-country and maintain competitor schedules. Regina Hays is a longtime supporter and dressage rider who served as treasurer through busy event seasons as well as helped prepare and run the dressage phase. Elizabeth Brown and Dave Chapman, who serves as our safety officer, donate both their time and money to all phases of the facility upkeep. Madison Gilbert is our new president and represents the up and coming youth we hope will keep the facility and club going forward."



Winners at the Powder Basin Horse Trials receive belt buckles as prizes! Photo courtesy of Carol Muirhead.

The Powder Basin Equestrian Association, as it is now known, has an arrangement with Campbell County and the City of Gillette that helps keep the cost for leasing the land affordable. "The city and county often support local clubs with low-cost land leases, which we have," Muirhead explained. "The rolling terrain of our plot of

land is perfect for a cross-country course. Through many years of volunteers and hired cross-country designers emerged a cross-country course, several sand dressage rings, and a stadium ring. We have a clubhouse, [and] the cross-country course offers non-jumping riders a great opportunity to have a quiet hack or condition horses." The facility, which is open all year as weather permits, also has access to ample stabling across the road at the Campbell County Cam-Plex for competition, schooling, and clinics.



Riders at Powder Basin enjoying a hack around the equestrian center. Photo courtesy of Carol Muirhead.

"The facility is in high prairie country with rolling hills that provide a good challenge to those who normally only get a course on flat ground," Muirhead described the cross-country course. "We offer traditional natural fences, newer obstacles, and two water features. All levels from Preliminary down to Introductory have updated

courses that makes best use of the terrain." Working with John Michael Durr as their course designer, this year Powder Basin will once again offer a Preliminary division and Introductory through Training levels are getting all-new cross-country tracks for the event in July.



Powder Basin's "Fort Robin." Photo courtesy of Carol Muirhead.

What does Muirhead most look forward to about the event each year? "The smiles of competitors and seeing the cross-country course green and the polished look of the facility from hours of preparation. We are a family-oriented event where everyone feels welcome. It is a great place to try out eventing in an Intro division or move a horse up a level. We are easy to get to and low key but challenging. We are a gem of a facility in the middle of the prairie – any east coast competitor would be jealous of what I have in my backyard!"

The USEA is profiling the history behind all USEA recognized events in the USEA Events A-Z series.

Events A-Z

Powder Basin
