

SETC 2008 – Southeastern Equestrian Trails Conference July 31 – Aug 2, 2008 Huge Success

The SETC has now come and gone. What a great experience it was for all who attended and those who worked to put it on. The Conference was hosted by the SC Horsemen's Council and held at the Sheraton Hotel in North Charleston with excursions to the USFS Jerico Trail, Mullet Hall Equestrian Center, Center for Therapeutic Riding, Charleston County Park at Folly Beach, and downtown Charleston.

We had participants from California, Idaho, Nebraska, Texas, Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Washington, DC. We had participants who were agency personnel that manage our public trails, private equestrian trails managers, experts on building and maintaining trails, experts on environmental considerations with equine trails usage, and many trail users that are interested in preserving equestrian trails for the future.

We had some truly remarkable speakers who shared their experiences and thoughts for the future of equestrian trails. We learned about creating partnerships between trail users and managers. We heard from representatives of the US National Park Service, Federal Highway Administration, US Forestry Service, SC State and County Parks, American Horse Council, and several private equestrian groups. We received information on Equine tourism, trailer safety, GPS operation and many other topics. We had a panel discussion with major agency representatives fielding a variety of questions. We had numerous Sponsors and vendors displaying information on their organizations who were also available to answer questions.

On Wednesday night, a BBQ dinner for the workers and early arrivals was provided by the Low Country Saddle Club and Mullet Hall Equestrian Center. The quality and quantity of food was amazing and the hospitality was great. We extend our heartfelt thanks to our hosts and especially chief cook Ray Tanner. We had a great time meeting and talking with many of the Low Country equestrians.

On Thursday, we had a tour of the USFS Francis Marion district for the hardcore trail experts who wanted to learn some new techniques about wetlands trails. They got to see some excellent demonstrations and heard from Forest Service personnel on how some trails issues were addressed. A great lunch of BBQ ribs and grilled hamburgers was provided by the Charleston County Parks and Recreational Commission's Phil Macchia and Ray Tanner.

There was also a tour of Low Country equestrian facilities including the Charleston Area Therapeutic Riding Center that uses horses as part of its program to meet the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of its clients. This tour group was served lunch at Mullet Hall Equestrian Center by Wild Wings Restaurant. The riding trails and facilities were shown by the Manager of Mullet Hall, Wendy Jackson. After lunch, this group was given complimentary horse drawn carriage rides through historical Charleston and spent some time in the downtown shopping area. On Thursday evening, we had a nice relaxing

welcome reception with a fajita buffet and cash bar so arriving participants could mingle and network with fellow trails enthusiasts.

Our conference on Friday was packed with informative and entertaining speakers, including official welcomes by Carol Deacon, President of the SC Horsemen's Council and Hugh Weathers, SC Commissioner of Agriculture. Our keynote speaker was Tom Seay of RFD TV - Best of America by Horseback, whose talk proved to be very thought provoking and entertaining. We had numerous other terrific speakers throughout the day with lots of important information for all equestrian trail riders.

Friday evening, we all loaded up on chartered busses and rode out to the Charleston County Park and Recreational complex at Folly Beach. The CCPRC personnel provided a *Frogmore Stew* (or *Low Country Boil*) for us. This consisted of sausage, corn, potatoes, and shrimp all cooked together into a delightful display of the Coast's finest cuisine. In addition there was shish kabob, numerous other items, and desserts to die for. This group really did it up right. The SC Forestry Commission provided vans and drivers to take people on tours of the beach. Many got out and walked on the beach. The weather put on a dazzling lightning display which encouraged a lot of us to stay under the shelter. Dr. Gene Wood of Clemson University was recognized for his work founding what has become the modern day SETC. SETC 2008 Chairman, Jim Edwards, and committee member Butch Kennedy presented Dr. Wood with a framed picture of him on the Clemson Equine Trail. Planning Committee members & supporters were presented custom hoof picks that were hand made by Butch Kennedy. It was a great evening enjoyed by all thanks to our CCPRC hosts.

On Saturday, we had a full day of exciting speakers, starting off with Ian Barlow of Idaho showing us remarkable feats of engineering around difficult trail issues using simple hand operated equipment and doing so with volunteers who were largely composed of youth. Ian was followed by several very informative speakers throughout the day. We ended up the day with Debbie Caffin who gave us a tremendous insight into the history and current workings of the US Forestry Service and how it impacts us as equestrian trail users.

Lastly, Helen Koehler told us about what to expect at SETC 2009 which will be held in Gainesville, Florida July 9-12, 2009. Helen has been working on it since Knoxville, so we are sure it will be an outstanding event for us to look forward to attending. Make your plans now to continue your participation in SETC - the premier trails conference in America.

The SC Horsemen's Council Board of Directors is very proud of the way the conference was executed, and the commitment so many of our members made to make this conference successful. As much as we want to pat ourselves on the back, we must recognize that our success was due in large part to the tremendous contributions of our partners, sponsors, and numerous supporters. We cannot say thank you enough to our SC Agency personnel who served on the Planning Committee for 18 long months planning every detail of this event. Many of them came to the conference and worked hard all weekend. Many of them provide supporting services that were invaluable. Only through

the generous grants we received from Christopher Douwes and the Federal Highway Administration, several South Carolina agencies, and the numerous sponsors who stepped up to help us, were we able to pull off the quality program that we did. This money helped to finance transportation, speaker expense, advertising, printing, meeting facilities & equipment, and the multitude of other costs required to conduct this conference. Many individuals contributed countless hours and personal expenses to assure the success of this event.

We are deeply indebted to our speakers who gave of their time and talent to prepare their presentations and to share their knowledge with us. Many of them traveled a great distance and gave up other opportunities to be with us. While we are a bit biased, we believe we had some of the best speakers ever for this conference. They will be a tough act to top by anyone.

The Hotel Management and Staff were extremely accommodating and completely engaged in all of our activities. They made a lot of difficult activities look easy through their organization, preparation, and good people working together with our committee. The meals were exceptionally good and received many glowing reports.

Our largest thanks are reserved for the participants. Those people who paid money out of their pockets or their agency budgets to attend the conference are the reason for our success. You booked the hotel rooms, paid the registration fees, and attended the events that were planned for you. We had a great group of participants who were engaged in the program, did a lot of networking, made a point to thank us for our efforts, and hopefully left with some new insights and a fresh commitment to work to preserve the equestrian trails we so enjoy riding.

This was a great experience for the members of the South Carolina Horsemen's Council. We were delighted to host the 2008 conference which we believe was a great success. While we are in no hurry to host another one, we hope that the experience by all involved will make everyone look forward to returning to our state when it is our turn to again host this event. As for now, on to Florida in 2009.....