

It was a dark and stormy night...alright Snoopy used this first but it really was a dark and stormy night when the first HOA member arrived at Walnut Creek State Park. The Texas arrivals picked a prime corner site and waited for the rest of the crowd to arrive. And arrive they did; from Mississippi, Oklahoma, Missouri and Indiana they drifted in over the course of the day with the last arriving just after dark on Friday night. By then campfires were roaring and visiting/trading/fun was starting. Friendships were easily renewed and new friendships were begun.

Saturday dawned cloudy, drizzly and, in general, should have been a miserable day; instead the enthusiasm and friendliness of everyone attending seemed to warm the air. Ignoring repeated calls for a trail ride the HOA Directors held a conformation and photo clinic. The AIHR halter champion, a buckskin stallion and a horse brought to the event for inspection purposes were used as examples of what to look for in conformation. Emphasis was placed on what constituted "Colonial Spanish" traits and what did not as well as things such as neck, tail set, etc. The audience was also advised to watch how the horse moved. The photo session focused on what was required for registration purposes. All were advised of the importance of showing all markings on the horse. This is necessary both for registration and specific identification of the horse in the event of theft or questions on ownership. Final outcome was that sometimes the four requested photos may well become five, six or more.

Finally, trail riding; the event that everyone had been waiting for. Some longer than others! It took a lot of getting ready to get ready with guys loping around on their horses claiming they were waiting for the women; women claiming they were waiting for the men to get their act together...well, you all know how it goes. A trail boss was deputized and everyone headed off into the drizzle. There were reportedly few mishaps on the trail; only one person slid off the back of a damp steed and everyone returned in even better spirits than when they left.

After horses were curried and bedded down everyone gathered for a gaiting demonstration. A Missouri Fox Trotter led off by demonstrating its unique way of moving. Then the high stepping, rapid foot action Paso Fino gait was shown. No Myth demonstrated the outstanding range of the Spanish Colonial horse by falling into an effortless foxtrot, speeding up to a rack, and sliding into a beautiful running walk. John Aulton, the moderator, identified the various gaits, provided advice on how to reinforce them by talking about muscle memory as well as the skeletal structure necessary to gaiting. Several of the attendees rode their horses into the ring to have their horse's gait identified. Once again Spanish Colonials demonstrated their

versatility by doing the foxtrot, running walk and the Indian Shuffle (stepping pace).

Then, as if by magic, food materialized. There was plenty of it, too. Venison. Jambalaya. Texas Chili. Topping it all off were deserts to die for. Yummy. Yummy. Everybody visited, raved about the food then gathered around a campfire for the general meeting. Not too sure how much attention was paid to the meeting itself as everyone kept eyeing the fire and trying to figure out how to get closer to its warmth!

Will leave the meeting notes to the newly appointed secretary. Suffice to say, it was interesting. We all learned a bit about the organization and the people involved but most importantly the shared passion all the attendees have for these amazing horses.

Sunday dawned a tad less dreary and, while some packed up to head home, still others headed back out to the trail. Now that business was done they were able to enjoy the beauty of the site the Hilligoss's selected for this year's meeting. The scenery was gorgeous with the trees dressed in full autumnal attire, the lake was relatively serene and the entire campground was groomed to a fare the well. Good pick, Gina and Jerry!

On a personal note, this was our first HOA meeting, but it will not be our last. The people we met were mahvelous (yeah, I stole that one from Billy Crystal); the horses were gorgeous; and we had a great time. For those of you that couldn't make it, we're sorry you weren't there and hope to meet you at future get-togethers.

Story by Polly Aulton