

Grasslands: America's Aintree

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Sportsmen, especially fox hunters, continually seek new venues for their hunts. As fields were wired, the fox hunters were gradually being deprived of good hunt countries. However, in Sumner County, Tennessee there existed some prime land that would make a good hunt country.

So in 1929, the Sumner County Land Company purchased or leased some 12000 acres at a cost of approximately \$950000. The intent was to develop a sporting estate for fox hunting, horse racing, steeplechases and other sporting activities. A sort of natural amphitheater existed in the area just north of the Fairview estate in which a first-rate steeplechase course could be constructed. Since one of the associates was Paul Brown, a man well acquainted with Aintree, the home of the Grand National, the development of the course was facilitated.

Subsequently, a steeplechase course modelled after that of Aintree was constructed in order that (1) a steeplechase course comparable to Aintree could be developed and (2) such a course would provide a superb training facility for American horses preparing for the Grand National.

The first course, one and one-quarter mile brush course with seven jumps, was the scene of the Grasslands Downs Inaugural Steeplechase, run on Monday, May 19 1930. The trophy for this race was a silver plate donated by His Grace, the Duke of Beaufort. The race was 2 ½ miles in length with 14 jumps. Following the race, the Aintree replica course was completed and two races were run over the 4 ½ mile course with 26 jumps.

The first race was run on December 6 1930 for a Challenge Cup offered by H.M. Alphonso, XIII, then king of Spain. Seventeen horses started, all of them fell but they remounted and continued, and Alligator won the race in 11 minutes, 25 seconds. A year later the second and last steeplechase at Grasslands Downs was run on December 5 1931. Glangesia won that race.

Following the demise of Grasslands Downs, steeplechasing became a local event until the start of the Iroquois in 1941.