



AP PHOTO

**New Jersey boasts the country's premier harness racing venue and some of the sport's top drivers.**

## IN BRIEF

### New Jersey's horse industry in peril

HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP, N.J. — New Jersey may be better known for smokestacks than green pastures, but businesses that rely on horses help preserve scenic vistas, from picturesque fields to rustic stables and riding rings.

The horse has been the state animal for 30 years, and New Jersey boasts the country's premier harness racing venue, the Meadowlands Racetrack, plus some of the sport's top drivers.

The last four harness racing "horses of the year" were bred in New Jersey. And this October, New Jersey will host the prestigious Breeders' Cup for the first time, a top race for thoroughbreds, which are ridden by jockeys, unlike the standardbreds that pull drivers in sulkies.

But experts say New Jersey's horse industry, from breeding farms to hay growers, is in jeopardy due to development, growing competition from racetracks with slot machines in neighboring states, and the steady decline in the fan base for horse racing.

"This is our critical year," said Mary Jo Herbert, a race-horse owner and breeder who is president of the State Board of Agriculture.

For several years, Atlantic City casinos have given subsidies to the state's four tracks, and in return the tracks have dropped efforts to get slot machines. But the subsidies expire at the end of the year, and no replacement funding is in sight.

### Corn supplanting cotton in Louisiana

NEW ORLEANS — Louisiana farmers planted about half as many cotton acres as last year, and their fewest in over 30 years, as they seeded more land to corn and other higher-price crops, the U.S. Department of Agriculture says.

That trend is being repeated across the South, with Florida the only state forecast to plant marginally more acres of cotton than in 2006.

"We're thankful for the ability to move back and forth among crops, to go to what is the most profitable," Jess Barr, executive vice president of the Louisiana Cotton Producers Association, said Saturday. "While I'd like to see more cotton planted out there, producers have to stay in business — and make money, to stay in business."

Cotton prices on the futures markets have improved in recent weeks, buoyed in part by stronger-than-expected cotton sales and a recognition that acreage would be down, he said.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Horses are seen on a dusty plain in this photograph from David and Anita's trip out West. The couple has been spending time in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Nevada.

## Cross-country trek gets a little dusty

This week we've really put some miles behind us, travelling through Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada (and even a tiny bit of California). We've seen some amazing views of mountains and plains, driven up as high as 7,500 feet above sea level and met yet more wonderful Americans on our travels through this great country.

We came to Colorado to stay with Michele & Alexis Neilsen at their new Equestrian venture for children, Rocky Ridge Equestrian Center (see [www.rockyridgeec.com](http://www.rockyridgeec.com) for more details), about 30 miles outside of Denver. We were really lucky in that we arrived the day after the exceptional heat wave of 105 degrees, and all we had were temperatures in the lower 90's with strong winds blowing the dust everywhere. Once or twice I felt as if I had stepped out of the trailer into a giant hairdryer someone had switched on! Alexis is Michele's daughter and pretty much runs the horse side of the business, training the horses and giving riding lessons to both individuals and groups (they run summer camps for kids too), but she took the time out of her busy schedule to take Anita and I up into the Rocky Mountains to trail ride at *Lair 'o the Bear Park* in Jefferson Co.

What a great ride we had and what wonderful views, although we only got as far as the highest spot on the mountain trail before the weather turned and we thought it best to head back down to the trailer. The weather changes very quickly in the mountains and what was a beautiful sunny day when we started was soon echoing to the rumble of thunder and looking very dark and threatening indeed. Because the trail was a little rocky in parts, I did actually have to walk back down some of it with Max, as he doesn't have shoes on his feet yet, and he was getting a little sore on



DAVID AND ANITA HASBURY-SNOGLES

one foot in particular — I thought I'd better play it safe rather than sorry as I didn't want to end up with a lame horse on my hands!

Still, if we thought it was hot and dusty in Colorado, it was nothing compared to our stay at Pete & Cheryl Towne's ranch out near Winnemucca, Nevada ([www.townefarms.com](http://www.townefarms.com)). We had originally planned to overnight at Pete's 190-acre farm whilst on our way to the Old Yella Dog Ranch near the border with California, 22 miles from Cedarville, but instead stayed for a couple of days. We ate, drank, breathed and slept dust, it was coming out of our ears and no matter how much you brushed off your boots, within 5 seconds of walking anywhere, they looked as if you'd been out on the trail for months. Our poor horses probably weighed at least 10 pounds extra each from all the dust they were carrying in their coats — they certainly didn't look the same color as they usually did! The views though were stunning, and we took the truck up onto the mountain range which surrounded the farm, and looked down onto the valley below — that's when we realized why people chose to live here.

Pete was a mine of local information and loved to spend hours just "chewing the fat" with us over places to go visit, over the local wildlife (coyotes can be dangerous things when dusk approaches, let alone the wolves!), and of course horses — he and his wife have some 50 head of horses and breed all sorts of Quarter Horse & Paint class winners



David Hasbury rides along a trail during the couple's recent trip out West.

(Halter, Show, Trail, Cutting, and Barrel racing).

We'd find that we were always an hour or two behind schedule in the mornings, because Pete would come along, say 'hi' for a while and we'd end up two hours later still trying to get away!

Of course, we learned a lot about some of the way of life out here in the "real" country, for example I mentioned how beautiful the countryside generally was apart from where you would find mini "scrap yards" right next to people's houses, and they were all over — real eyesores.

Pete explained however that these were essential "stack yards", because everyone lived so far from any major center, it meant that every time they went on a trip, they would come back with a load of wood, metal, stone, whatever was needed, and then store it for future use. Same applied to old trucks and cars — you never knew when you might need a part, and you could go sal-

vage it off of an old wreck, rather than travel a hundred miles or more to buy something that cost you as much in gas as the part itself.

I see now how it all kind of makes sense; it just depends on how you look at things. I'd been looking from a conservationist/tourist viewpoint, when in fact it was a "settlers" and realists' view I should have been considering.

Life is hard in these parts. Pete said you need to stockpile stuff just in case you need it one day — of course the problem arises when you can't remember which one of the many stacks you put that essential item in!

Until next week ...

*David and Anita Hasbury-Snogles are British residents riding across the United States on horseback to raise money for charity. Visit [HorseQuestUSA.org](http://HorseQuestUSA.org) for more information. David can be reached at [david\\_hasbury@yahoo.com](mailto:david_hasbury@yahoo.com).*

## Escaped methane kills five

Four were members of Mennonite family

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRIDGEWATER — Deadly methane gas emanating from a dairy farm's manure pit killed five people, including four members of a Mennonite family, authorities said.

Emergency workers speculate that after the first victim was overcome Monday, the others climbed into the pit in a frantic rescue attempt. "It was a domino effect with one person going in, the second person going after them," Rockingham County Sheriff Don Farley said.

Farley identified the victims as Scott Showalter, 34; his wife, Phyllis, 33; their daughters, Shayla, 11, and Christina, 9; and Amous Stoltzfus, 24, who worked at the Showalters' dairy farm in the Briery Branch community.

The accident began when Scott Showalter tried to transfer manure from one small pit to a larger one, measuring 20 feet by 20 feet and 8 feet deep.

The pipe that was transferring the manure became clogged, and Showalter climbed in the pit to fix the blockage, Farley said.

"It was probably something he had done a hundred times," Farley said. "There was gas in there and he immediately succumbed."

Emergency workers believe Stoltzfus climbed into the pit in an attempt to rescue Showalter. Phyllis Showalter and the two girls were outside the milking barn, heard the commotion, then all went into the pit and succumbed to the deadly gas.

Methane gas is an odorless and colorless byproduct of liquefied manure. The pit was poorly vented, Farley said.

Sonny Layman, one of the farmhands, said he tried to save Phyllis Showalter by hooking her onto a grate and pulling her up.

"I tried to hook her but I couldn't," a visibly shaken Layman said. "... It's in the lord's hands."

Bruce Good, Scott Showalter's cousin, was among the family and friends who had come to the medium-sized farm on a hill to finish clearing the drain and milking the cows on Tuesday. In the distance stood an off-white, two-story house with black shutters, a small garden and a clothesline with laundry blowing in the wind.

Good said he believes yeast Showalter was using to stretch his cow feed had fermented and seeped into the manure system, accelerating the creation of the gas.

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