
7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY

The Rillito Racetrack Chute is the integral component of the extensive Rillito Racetrack in Tucson, Arizona, considered the birthplace of regulated Quarter Horse racing. Constructed in 1943, the chute is a 3/8 mile straight stretch of prepared dirt track and is 45 feet wide. This portion of the current track is the site where the rules and specifications for Quarter Horse racing were established/formulated between 1943-1946. The chute is nominated as a structure under criterion A because of its significant contribution to the development of Quarter Horse racing. While the Rillito complex has grown over the years, the chute and the track itself still strongly convey the feeling and association with the 1943-1946 period.

DEVELOPMENT AND SETTING

When racing activity began at Rillito, there were no structures or facilities other than the chute itself, located on an 88 acre parcel at the base of the Catalina Mountains north of Tucson. The surrounding area was largely undeveloped and sparsely populated desert. Today the 88 acre parcel buffers the Racetrack from adjacent suburban development.

The chute is the straight leg on the south of the current oval racing track and extends approximately 50 yards past the northern end of the oval. Quarter Horses race on a straight track; the oval track is a late 1950's addition to expand the facility for trotters and thoroughbred horses. The track itself is a prepared surface of compacted soil, built up on a sand base, that provides an evenly textured racing surface. The course is essentially a level, 3/8 mile long, 45 foot wide surface without any noticeable gradient or slope.

In the early years a variety of temporary sheds and stables was constructed to serve the utilitarian needs of the horses and racing activity. In 1953 the track was resurfaced and the adjoining oval track enlarged to enable Rillito to accommodate thoroughbred horses as well as Quarter Horses. Additional corrals, stables, and administrative facilities were eventually constructed, including a large grandstand in the early 1960's. However, since these structures are not associated directly with the initial 1943-1946 period or with the actual origins and regulations of racing, they are excluded from the nomination.

All of the alterations and adjacent structures are related to the subsequent evolutionary growth of Rillito Racetrack into a modern racing facility able to accommodate the large numbers of spectators ultimately attracted to the Quarter Horse events. While the character of the initial track environs has changed from the 1943-46 era, the overall setting and context are directly related to ultimate growth of Quarter Horse racing that evolved from the origins in 1943. The later structures, primarily stables and corral facilities, strengthen the inherent associative values of the site rather than detract from the setting.

The only prominent structure that has a major effect on the historic setting is the grandstand itself. Again, however, its direct association with the expansion and contemporary history of the track compensates for its impact.

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Continuation sheet 1

Item number 7

Page 2

The surrounding Rillito acreage also helps to reinforce the historic qualities of the site. The land is still used for grazing and practice rings, with stable facilities at the boundaries of the property, all of which lend to the equestrian feeling and ambience at Rillito.