



THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

Trails Stewardship Committee

Spotlight on Charles County: Maxwell Hall Park Equestrian Area

by Katherine O. Rizzo

There are five public parks in Charles County with equestrian-use trails, the most popular of which -- according to The Equiery's 2021 Trails Survey -- is Maxwell Hall Park Equestrian Area. The 692-acre park in Hughesville offers 14 miles of trails. Trailer parking is off Maxwell Drive.

Maxwell Hall is open year-round, weather permitting, from 8am until dusk. The park is closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years Day. The trails are a mix of open fields and woodlands as well as shoreline and beach areas. Some of the terrain can be steep in areas.

The property was originally known as Maxwell's Seat, and you can still see the mansion built in 1768 by merchant, tobacco farmer, and slaveowner George Maxwell. The foundations are made of chert (a type of hard, sedimentary, crystalline rock) imported from northern England or Scotland, the ancestral home of the Maxwell family. According to local tradition, the British invasion force took possession of Maxwell Hall during its march from the Chesapeake Bay to Washington in August 1814, which could explain why the house was not torched, as were so many others in the area during the War of 1812. The property was also the site of Camp Stanton, a Union recruiting station for African American troops during the Civil War, which also served as the training ground for several regiments of the U.S. Colored Troops.

There are six main trails at Maxwell Hall, each of which is well-marked. It is recommended by the county that novice riders stick to the Red and Blue trails which follow the edge of fields and wooded areas. Both trails

lead to the Patuxent River with horse rest locations.

More experienced riders can find creek crossings, bridges, moderate to steep inclines/declines on the Orange, Brown and Green trails. The Orange trail also has a judged trail course in the woods featuring 11 obstacles for practicing.

The Yellow trail follows the edge of a field and features eight cross-country style jumps including logs, coops, brush boxes and straw bales.

Charles County Recreation and Parks posts on its website: "Remember -- know your limitations, wear a helmet and always jump with a partner." Trail maps can be found online at <https://www.charlescountyparks.com/home/showpublisheddocument/36/637080922151430000> and at the sign-in bulletin board in the trailer parking area.

Maxwell Hall trails are open to hikers as well and dogs are permitted but must be leashed at all times. Bicycles and all forms of motorized vehicles are not allowed in the park. The park is also a working grain farm and park officials remind users to stay clear of tractors and other farm equipment and to not ride on cropland.

Although Maxwell Hall is a public park, Charles County Recreation and Parks requires visitors to get a permit.

Additional park rules can be found at <https://www.charlescountymd.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/24/637080839261770000>



Legend:

- Horse Trailer Parking Lot
- Hikers Parking Lot
- Warm-up Area
- Woods
- Fields
- Trail Course
- Historic House

- Yellow Trail** - (1.3 Miles) First trail you encounter on the Main Trail; Riders travel along the edge of the field/woods area. Connects to Blue Trail or follow to the end, back onto Main Trail. * Features a cross country jump course.
- Orange Trail** - (2.3 Miles) Challenging trail; Riders travel through woods up and down (steep) hills and some forge areas. * Features The Trail Course.
- Blue Trail** - (2.8 Miles) Starts/Ends on Main Trail (Connects with Yellow Trail); Riders travel along edge of Field/woods area. * Features Beach Rest area.
- Red Trail** - (1.8 Miles) Last trail along the Main Trail; (Starts/Ends). Riders travel along the edge of a field/woods area, and shore line. * Features a Rest Area.
- Green Trail** - (2.8 Miles) Starts off the Orange Trail in the woods. Riders travel through the woods /fields; moderate hills. * Leads to Water/Rest Area.
- Brown Trail** - (3.5 Miles) Most challenging trail; Starts off of the Green Trail. Riders travel through woods up and down (steep) hills, and some ford areas. * Features two Rest Areas / Scenic Overlooks.