

BLAZING THE TRAILS

Yankton Runners Utilize
Lake Area Trails To Leave
Competition In The Dust

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With six South Dakota State AA Cross Country Combined Team titles out of the last 10 years and seven girls' team titles out of the last nine years, there is no doubt that the Yankton High School is the most successful cross country team in the state in recent years.

But what sets the Bucks and Gazelles apart from the stiff competition of the Class AA rankings?

Head cross country coach Dave Dannenbring thinks the answer lies in a secluded wooded area along Yankton's Lewis and Clark Lake.

"We keep telling our kids that they are fortunate enough to be running every day in a vacation destination of Lewis and Clark Lake," Dannenbring said. "The horse trails are like a running mecca. We get some flat trails, we get the beautiful lake, and the trails out there are fairly extreme. So for them to run them every week is a physical and mental challenge."

For the past several years, the Yankton cross country athletes have been running the Lewis and Clark trails — the horse trails — every Tuesday during training. After a mile warm up,

the team is sent out on one of the trails, depending on the difficulty of the route and ability level. With no time limit and the goal to finish the entire trail without walking in mind, the Yankton runners are gaining invaluable strength and endurance training that most teams around the state could only dream of.

"Since we've been going out there every week, we've had the success that we've had," Dannenbring said. "We think that's kind of our 'X factor' that other towns don't have."

Built in the mid-80's with available park money and the need for some kind of recreational trail, the horse trails are also used for hiking, biking, and horseback riding for campers and visitors. Originally constructed out of an unused wooded area, the trails were resurfaced in 2003 and run in a series of loops about four and a half miles long through trees and, most importantly, up and down hills.

"Well I think why they call them the 'X factor' is because there are some pretty good hills in there that are really challenging for people and for horses," Shane Bertsch, District Park Supervisor for Lewis and Clark Recreation Area, said. "So for building up leg strength and endurance, that's probably what helps them."

In cross country, hill training is extremely beneficial because of the different types of courses that the runners face each meet. By running trails with extreme inclines and declines, the Yankton athletes have an advantage on race day.

"We have to do a little bit of hill training because in cross country, you are going to run on courses where you have to go uphill and downhill," Dannenbring said. "Running downhill is one of the hardest techniques to learn. You can really improve your time and pass people on the downhill or you can slow yourself up if your body's not used to the change in stride. We think the horse trails is a great way to train for that."

One of the top runners on the Gazelles' state title team, Jenna Grossenburg placed fourth at the State AA Cross Country Meet last season and attributes much of that success to her team's unique training.

"My coaches always motivated us that not a lot of other teams are running horse trails every Tuesday," she said. "So it always gave us confidence that every Tuesday we got used to running hills."

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YANKTON HIGH SCHOOL: 2011 Class AA Girls & Combined Team Champions

Yankton Looks To Continue Its Cross Country Dominance

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As the defending South Dakota State AA Cross Country combined team and girls' team champions, the Yankton Bucks and Gazelles do not plan on lowering their expectations for the 2012 season.

"Not at all," head cross country coach Dave Dannenbring said. "We have

it as a goal to be the number one combined team in the state. We want our girls and our boys to be number one. And we think with the talent we have coming back that we will be contenders for both the boys' and girls' top spots."

The Bucks and Gazelles are entering this season with probably the biggest target on their back in the state of South Dakota in cross country. Not only did the team grab two titles last season, but

the combined boys' and girls' team has been State AA champions six times in the last 10 years while the Gazelles have been the girls' champion seven of the last nine years.

And the goals set for this season are no different from the past decade of Yankton dominance, even despite the losses of some crucial runners from last year's team.

The boys' team will be missing two

key runners from last year, Kipp Kinsley, who was fourth at the state meet, and Logan Smith. For the girls, the team lost Jenna Grossenburg, the girls state champions' highest place winner at fourth.

But Dannenbring is confident in his returners to keep Yankton competing at a high level.

"We have a whole crew of young boys and girls that look very good," Dannenbring said. "So I'm very excited about

that."

Some of this crew on the boys' side includes juniors Brice Cowman, who placed 19th at the state meet, Justin Grode, and Ryan Olson, and senior Jacob Bies. The girls' returners who are striving for another title are juniors Whitlee Larson, ninth at the state meet,

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