

Country Folks

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COUNTRY FOLKS EAST



Barefoot hoof trimming

Observing horses in the wild

At the Barefoot Hoof Trimming clinic held in the fall at Hoofbeats Holistic, Clinician Geri White gave an in-depth introduction of the barefoot trim. In the afternoon students in the class were able to practice the barefoot trim on cadaver hooves, and the next day

were actually able to put their new skills to work by trimming live horses under her watchful eye.

A couple of power point presentations with beautiful photos visually added much to the class's understanding of the lifestyle differences of horses in the wild versus domestic

horses and how the horse's feet are impacted.

At the American Hoof Association's Annual Conference some years ago, she had the opportunity to take a field trip to visit the Cold Creek Mustangs in Nevada's Humboldt National Forest, and stated that it took a good two hours to find the horses. The terrain in the photographs was strikingly barren — hundreds of square miles of dry land, rocks, sagebrush,

and some evidence of horses but hardly any grass. She explained how horses will forage for miles to find the little sprigs of grasses that pop up through the rocks and in the shade of the sagebrush. She said the terrain was littered with dead trees from previous forest fires, but the horses ran easily through these obstacles seemingly without even looking where they were going. They would actually move

the dead wood in order to get the tiny bits of grass growing underneath and in between.

Over the wintertime, the wild horses lose 10 percent of their body weight — and as a result, their internal parasites leave! Some of the horses were thin, some were heavier but none had any problems with their hooves, which were short, strong and sturdy with no stress lines, lumps or bumps that are often

seen in our domestic horses. The horses were all together, mares, stallions, and young, and these bands of horses were in movement with the circadian rhythm of earth — from the rising of the sun and moon over a 24-hour period, and were very in tune with that. She explained that as a result, the wild mustangs have a difficult time adjusting to our lives and

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Students watch closely as Geri draws a line around the outer wall where they would be using the nippers to trim the hoof.

Photos by Judy Van Put

HOOF TRIMMING from A14

living in captivity.

An interesting finding was the surprising length of the incisors (teeth) of the wild horses — we use the term "Long in the tooth" to indicate old age — as the incisors of our domestic horses' teeth continue to grow and eventually grow out and become elongated — but the wild horses actually have short incisors due to having to tear and chew their varied foods all year round! They are not feeding on softer hay, grains or other concentrates that our domestic horses are dependent on. Geri was able to take a look at a wild stallion's front teeth and found that they were as short and even as

a young horse's teeth would be. In a study of the wild Brumbies of Australia by Brian Hampson, he mentions wild horses even 35 years of age that still had teeth, all of the same length and angle, all lined up beautifully.

The next set of images showed less than ideal situations where the "human factor" enters in — photos of horses penned in cages, tied in stalls, left in dark barns, a horse cast in its stall, overly fat "halter horses". Clinic participants were asked what thoughts came to mind as they watched the images on the screen — and most agreed that the horses must have been

exhibiting frustration, boredom, fear, lacking exercise, not being safe.

A conversation ensued about the importance of educating horsekeepers and explaining the importance of caring for their horses properly in a non-confrontational way — offering to help, suggesting providing more exercise, fresh air, space to run and roll, proper nutrition, utilizing common sense in how you plan to use your horse. All these things add up to the overall health of the horse, including his feet.

Missy (our host) added how important saddle fit was, and told a story of a treeless saddle she had purchased that always

felt crooked — one leg felt longer than other. The person she bought the saddle from "rode their disability into that saddle...and I realized that now I'm taking that disability and riding it into my horse... now I ride in a bareback pad." Geri agreed you can ride a disability into the biochemical functionality of the horse, and you ride it into their feet. She had a similar experience, and mentioned side dominance — rider balance — you can see by watching people walking.

Geri began her trimming instruction by saying "it's not what you take that makes you a good trimmer, it's what you leave" and also suggested "don't try to create a rounded side, it will happen on its own."

The participants were seated in a circle in the center of the large covered arena and each chose a cadaver hoof to work on. The students were given a hoof pick, hoof knife and nippers to work with, as well as Duct Tape to wrap

the leg above the hoof to keep it clean while working. Each of the cadaver hooves had its own story to tell — some were grossly overgrown, others have had the bars growing over

the sole, many had the frog shrunken with lots of separation. It was easy to see how dire the situation must have been with

HOOF TRIMMING A18



In a round-table type forum, students in the hoof trimming class were able to interact with each other while learning the basics of trimming. Here two students are using the rasp to smooth the hoof that they've just trimmed.

these poor animals, probably as a result of neglect, poor diet, laminitis and possibly ignorance on the part of the people caring for the horses.

Using nippers and a rasp, Geri demonstrated how to nip away the excess overgrown part of the hoof, and then smooth it down with the rasp, making a smooth "Mustang Roll" around the outer edge of the wall. She mentioned how close horses are to the earth, and mentioned "event" lines that will show up in the wall of the hoof, such as dietary change, environmental stress, herd changes. "For everything you can control in a positive way, there are some things we can't control, such as a big weather event or big change in the environment — days of hot and dry weather to days of cold and rainy weather can leave a line."

Geri told a fascinating story about environmental stress and how it affects horses — "in every horse I trimmed after the Fukushima fallout in March of 2011 there was an event line in every body's horse's feet including my own horses — because of what happened in Japan when the nuclear reactor blew — the fallout traveled all across the globe. The horses all had an event line at the exact same spot directly related to what happened in Japan back in March... it was one trim cycle, 5-6 weeks afterward, that all my client horses — hundreds of horses — had a stress line!"

sole of the foot has a waxy-looking sheen; and what they encounter before that — chalky material — is probably excess sole. In the dissection of one foot, the digital cushion of the horse's frog was soft, like chicken fat, due to not being used or touching the ground. Another student had a hoof

that was grossly overgrown and had a separated toe — the frog was so small and far back from where it should be. The dissection made it easy to see how the deep digital flexor tendon attaches to bottom of the coffin bone, and how the flexor and extensor tendons work. One sample foot showed

calcification of the tendon, probably caused by concussion problems, on a horse that had shoes; another showed a flare on the wall that it was putting its weight on like a fulcrum. A third student was nipping away a hoof and found a channel that extended up into the foot, caused by an infection. It

looked like a nail hole with lots of chalky material in the sole and hoof wall. A fourth student dissected through a foot and found uneven thickness of the hoof wall on one side; the bone under the sole was noticeably higher than on the other side. Two other students studied the frogs; one

had a tiny frog in relation to what it should have been; while the other had a good large frog extending $2/3 - 3/4$ way up through the sole but a very narrow foot, which was probably pinched.

The students were all very enthusiastic and appreciative of how much they had learned.