

HORSE WHISPERS

To Shoe or Not to Shoe!!

By Heidi Toussaint

A hhhhhh, horses!! What magnificent creatures, so graceful and noble. As a young girl, I dreamed for many years of having my own horse. Finally at the age of 14, I had one. And I loved that horse so much. Unfortunately, when it was time to go off to college, my parents couldn't keep him on, so he was sold. For many years after that, I always dreamt of having a horse again. Now I'm 44 years old, and it's finally happened!

We bought a mare and her colt, which had been rescued by a young gal who just couldn't stand by anymore seeing how this mare was being treated. But with the hard economical times, she could not afford to have two more horses, as she already had 5. This is where we came in. After learning how this lovely mare had been so badly treated, it made me want to give her a loving home even more. Once to our place, I realized that Burta (our mare), was in dire need of having her hooves trimmed. Not knowing where to turn, I started to look on the internet for farriers. This is where I discovered various websites about horses' hooves. I've learned that keeping your horse barefoot is actually the healthiest for them. To my surprise, in the last 10 years, veterinarians and scientists have been studying the wild horses and gathering information on how they manage to keep their hooves fit. They even noticed that wild horses have a tendency of living longer than our domestic ones! How can this be?

After all of my research, I started looking around in the Boise area for someone who knew how to do the natural trim or mustang roll. I learned that there is a trim for when the horse will be shod, and a pasture trim. But neither of them have anything to do with the shape of our wild horses. Little did I know, a barefoot trimmer would be hard to find. I talked with many people; most of them had never heard of the barefoot trim, and many thought I was crazy to think I could ride a horse with no shoes. Finally, after many phone calls, I found someone here in our area.

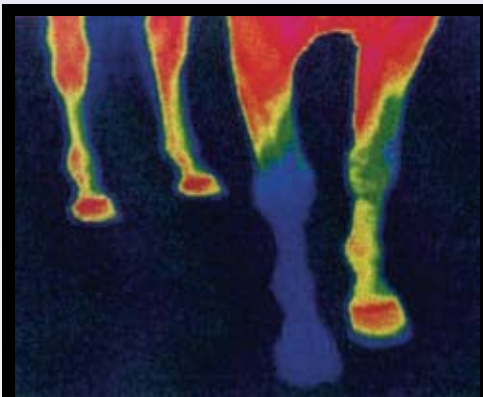
Her name is Barbara Dunn; she lives on the outskirts of Meridian. I explained to her how worried I was about our new mare and that after a lot of research, I felt the best way to go for her would be barefoot. Barbara was happy to come out and take a look at her. Through Barbara, I have learned a lot. And she has been kind enough to do an interview with me about going barefoot.

Barbara was born in Alaska, and moved to Idaho when she was 8 years old. This is when her love for horses really grew and finally had her own horse when she was 13. Later in life, when her kids were born, she did have a time without horses, but that didn't last long. With 3 kids, she realized that she wanted horses that were more educated, and not going to have a fit every time they ran into something new. This is when she decided to look into different

training methods for the safety of all. She chose to attend the John and Josh Lyons Certification Program in 2007 held in Colorado, which had 3 rules to follow. 1) You can't get hurt, 2) Your horse can't get hurt, 3) Your horse must be calmer when you finish with him than when you started. This means it's a softer approach and not your typical Buckaroo kind of training. You definitely have times where you swallow your pride, but the results are phenomenal. It has more to do with conditional response training, bonding and your horse gaining confidence in himself and you. Barbara trains both domestic horses and wild horses. She is a Leader in our local 4H club, helping kids to learn more about these beautiful creatures. The kids have even been learning how to train young mustangs that would go up for adoption.

Going barefoot was yet another learning experience for Barbara.

Like most of us, she had learned to shoe horses, and that is what is done! A friend of hers who had a big thorough bred mare with problem feet and just couldn't get sound (after trying everything), asked her to come along to Montana to visit with a vet who has been studying the wild horses for many years, Dr. Tia Nelson. At first she was very reluctant about the way they wanted to trim her friend's horse as it wasn't at all what she was used to seeing, as Barbara had always been taught that the hoof needs a longer heel. In fact, most domestic horses walk toe to heel, rather than heel to toe. But Barbara got to see first hand how Dr. Nelson's trim would help this mare, and 3 hours after getting this trim, this mare that nobody could ride anymore was up and about. They were able to ride her right away, cutting cattle! And she stayed sound after this. Barbara even had Dr. Nelson trim her own horse's hooves. Her horse that was normally so well behaved in everything they did, was just a whole other horse when it came to getting his hooves done. It was so bad before, that they would have to use a war bridle or give him something to calm him down. To Barbara's disbelief, Dr. Nelson was able to trim her horse's



Here is a thermographic image from the book, "Shoeing: A Necessary Evil?" (written by Dr. Vet. Med. Hiltrud Strasser, edited and translated by Sabine Kells and photo from Schlosser), of the legs of a horse which is only shod on the front right. As you can see for yourself, the 3 barefoot hooves have great circulation, but the hoof that has been shod does not.

hooves without hardly any problems. She now knows that if her horse is dancing around and being difficult, it's more than likely his hooves are hurting him. She now stays with the natural trim and keeps him barefoot. With all of this, Barbara also got to learn from Tia more about the physics involved on how the hoof should be balanced. When she learned how the parameters should be, she saw it just made sense. Dr. Nelson also taught her that there are times when a shoe is needed. Usually for when the trim has too much tender area; the shoe then can help the horse to adapt to this. But it's not a long term solution. It's just an aid at that time. After her visit in Montana, that's when Barbara decided to learn more about all of this. She has studied Dr. Nelson's methods and Dr. Hiltrud Strasser's methods. She found that Dr. Strasser also had some great ideas and a lot of facts to back them up. But she realized that

not all of her methods could be used here, as Dr. Strasser is from Germany, where the climate is much more moist than our dry Idaho weather. And this does affect the horse's hooves. Plus, Dr. Strasser's techniques can be too invasive if you do not have the time to do all of the follow up work that is necessary. Now she is also studying Pete Ramey's methods. But through Dr. Strasser and KC Lepierre she was able to learn even more on how nailing shoes into the hooves has its effects on the horse. In fact, when you are putting a shoe on a horse, you are cutting off much of its circulation, making him numb down below the knee to his hoof, which is why you can go anywhere with a shod horse.

Barbara understands that going barefoot is not always as easy as it sounds. There is a transition time for getting your horse's hooves tough enough to where you can ride them anywhere. But there is a solution for those of you who would like to take this route. During the transition time, you can always use horse boots to protect your horse's hooves. There are many different types of boots available. The key is getting a balanced hoof.

Each horse is different, and it's not a "one solution fits all," kind of plan. You will more than likely have to make certain changes in your horse's environment in order for this to work. And maybe need to exercise him more frequently. But you'll end up with a horse that is healthy and happy. My own mare, Burta, is a true example of this. At first, she would only let me clean her front hooves, and I could hardly even get her back legs up because she struggled so much. I started to wonder if maybe she was in pain back there. Barbara told me that her hooves were so out of alignment, that it was making it hard for her to lift her legs for cleaning or trimming. So she was in pain, and her front hooves were so off balance that she also had pain in her shoulders. After just one trim, Burta's whole attitude changed. The days following her trim, she no longer had a problem lifting her back leg, and her hooves are looking great. She started out with a flat hoof with no frog showing, but after just one month, her frog is starting to show itself. I'm so pleased to see the difference in such a short time after we have been following Barbara's advice. Now we even see a difference in how Burta moves. Before she was a slow mover; now she will even run up to us! It's just amazing!



Picture of Barbara Dunn riding her horse without shoes in rocky terrain. (picture provided by Barbara) Please see Barbara's contact information on page 17.

MORE INFORMATION ----->

If you would like to learn more about this kind of trim and the benefits for your horse going barefoot visit www.barefoothorse.com

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Know your Breed?

The Basset Hound... A Friend in Low Places

They smell, they drool, they're stubborn as a mule. They're loving, low-slung and lumpy. They've got short, silly legs, long, laughable ears, bodies that go on 'til next week, and voices that come out of the ground.



photo by drc.org

They're basset hounds: the breed that invented casual. A lovely and amusing household pet for people with a good sense of humor. The Basset Hound is essentially a hunting dog with strong natural instincts and will power.

Known as the "Hush Puppy" dog, they have the head of a Bloodhound and the body of a Dachshund.

Their tracking skills are excellent, their scenting abilities are only second to that of a Bloodhound. Basset Hounds are generally very vocal, and love to bawl. Gentle and loving to their family, they make a wonderful companion. Minimal grooming of their coat is needed. Careful attention should be paid to their long ears. This breed should be taught basic obedience persistently very early. Plenty of moderate exercise will help keep them fit and trim; long walks or scent games are best for Basset Hounds.