

NEWSLETTER

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Trim Protocols and Reality

Trimming hooves effectively requires an almost intuitive ability to read what we have to work with, and apply what we've been taught, while judiciously side-stepping the "always do this" or "never do that" assertions made by many hoof care protocols.

Any aspiring trimmer with an ounce of humility will quickly learn that this makes the learning curve almost unsurmountably steep. In a critical time with ample anecdotal evidence, but limited research, available to guide the snap of the nippers, the swipe of the rasp, and the cut of the hoof knife, your ultimate guide is your gut instinct, channeled by a complete understanding of anatomy and structure, as well as the possible pathologies, and both their causes and their effects.

Accepting ANY trim protocol as gospel will eventually lead you to question everything...and rightly so. But the hardest thing to accept as an aspiring natural hoof care provider is the very fact that THERE ARE NO ABSOLUTES. Dang it all to hell and back again, right? Learn to live that truth. What works on one

horse, one foot, in one type of environment, is going to fail miserably on a different horse, different foot, different environment.

Are there broad generalizations that are effective? You bet. The basic trim guidelines -- use the live sole plane as a guide, don't invade the sole, early breakover, relatively short heel -- all of these things are absolutely universal, but also subjective.

But applying hard and fast rules regarding angles, or toe and heel measurements, is a recipe for disaster. Don't believe me? Think about it. This is exactly what farriers are taught. How successful is that protocol, even for the unshod horses? Not so much, right?

Of course, in all fairness, it's largely **how that protocol is applied**, and not the protocol itself, that throws a monkey wrench in things. Manipulating dorsal angle by thinning the wall from top to bottom, or by trimming toe from the bottom and invading much needed sole depth, or "growing heel" to stand up an underrun foot, are great examples of the WRONG way to achieve what might actually be the right idea.

Without engaging a debate on dorsal/hairline/heel angle, I think the best evidence for what is truly best for the horse is quite literally what we see in the healthiest, soundest feet when we

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ignore those parameters. In my own experience, those feet defy the more radical (Strasser and similar) trim protocols vehemently, and frankly, approach a more standard profile.

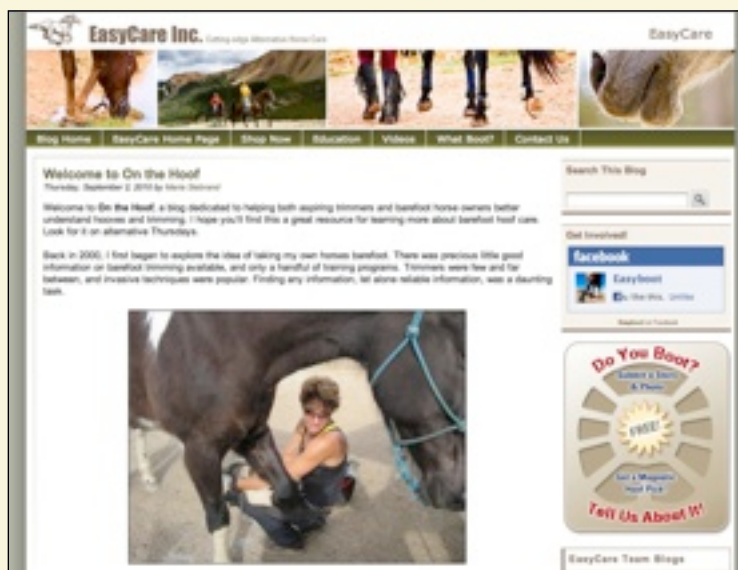
Keen observation is your best tool here. Listen to the hoof, listen to the horse. Heel is not a four letter word; whacking it off to achieve a cookie-cutter hairline angle or "get the frog on the ground" at all costs is a fools' errand. Ditto every other always or never you've ever heard in conjunction with barefoot hoof care. The frog, the bars, the sole may all need trimming in different circumstances, although not always! And unfortunately, sometimes, taking away what needs to be removed to make a

good change ultimately for the hoof will indeed make the horse tender, although that discomfort should never be severe. And in those circumstances, it is your job as a professional to figure out a way to keep the horse comfortable in the meantime, be it boots and pads or hoof casting.

It's also hugely important to accept and acknowledge not only your limitations as an individual trimmer, but also the simple fact that in spite of our very best efforts, we simply can't fix everything. Always take the horse's age, history and conformation into account, and be honest and reasonable about the potential of each and every case.

Check out my NEW "On the Hoof" Blog at EasyCare!

If you enjoy my website and my monthly newsletters, be sure to visit my new blog for EasyCare Inc. I'll share trimming tips, how-to articles, and all sorts of information on -- well, the HOOOF!



I'll be posting a new article every other Thursday. But don't just wait for my articles -- there are many other fantastic writers contributing to the main blog regularly.

Click below to read my first entry:

<http://blog.easycareinc.com/blog/easycare/0/0/trimming-tips-making-it-easy-for-you-and-the-horse>

Secrets of the Feral Foot Revealed

Mid-August found me making a pilgrimage to Los Angeles for the annual Pacific Hoof Care Practitioners Conference.

As a certified PCHP practitioner and mentor, I was eager to meet with my colleagues. But the real highlight of the weekend was the full-day lecture presented by Brian Hampson, Postgraduate PhD scholar, of the University of Queensland, School of Veterinary Science's, Australian Brumby Research Unit, headed up by Professor Chris Pollitt.

If the name Chris Pollitt sounds familiar, perhaps it's because Pollitt is one of the leading laminitis researchers in the world. A quick search on the U.S. National Library of Medicine database yields some 51 published studies relating to laminitis since 1980. Well-respected in the veterinary community, Pollitt's brumby research is aimed at helping us better understand how to keep our domestic horses sound and healthy via diet, movement, lifestyle, and more appropriate hoof care.

A single full day was barely enough time to allow Dr. Hampson to really give us the full breadth of the research. The research unit collected data from feral herds living in distinctly different types of environments. The environments varied in substrate (the ground upon which the horses traveled), rainfall, proximity of water holes, and availability of food. The data from these disparate lifestyles was then compared.

There was a fairly large discrepancy in the distance traveled between the groups. At the extreme, horses in arid desert areas traveled the furthest regularly -- up to 155km per week -- between water holes and forage. These were the horses with the type of foot we typically consider our ideal: deeply concave, wall worn to sole plane, with a dramatic bevel. And indeed, these horses sported the most symmetrical foot amongst the groups studied. But the research team unveiled a shock: these very high

travel feet, worn by hard ground and rugged terrain, showed damaged lamellae in the front of the foot -- evidence of mechanical laminitis. Consistent with that finding was fact that the extensor process of the distal phalanx (essentially the top of the coffin bone) in horses on rocky substrate measured consistently lower in the hoof capsule than horses on sand dunes.

Morphometric measurements from all of the groups compared yielded consistent dorsal wall angle, heel angle, and hairline angle numbers. I found it interesting, but not surprising, that these findings differed significantly from the parameters touted by Strasser and trimming guidelines derived from Strasser's theories, such as Martha Olivo's techniques.

On the other end of the spectrum, and much less surprising, were the feet of the horses living in high rainfall areas, with easy access to lush forage and no need to travel for water. As one might have expected, these feet were long and laminitic.

In addition to the studies using GPS tracking to monitor the movement of the feral horses, the team studied the effect of different pasture arrangements on the movement of domestic horses. The results might make you rethink your paddock paradise track. An open pasture of about ten acres proved most effective!

Other studies focused on the brumby diet; the feet of fetal horses to measure differences that might indicate biological adaptation; surface weight bearing of the hoof; and how environment might effect moisture content in the hoof wall.

The take home messages for hoof care are hardly shocking. Adequate movement is critical. But while rugged, hard terrain molds a foot with excellent biomechanics, too much movement over this type of ground without protection can still cause damage. Obesity is dangerous, and diet is important, but a horse on a less-than-ideal diet, getting adequate movement, will forge a healthier foot than a sedentary horse on the perfect diet.

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A list of the studies generated by the Australian Brumby Research Unit:

Monitoring distances travelled by horses using GPS tracking collars

AVJ 88(5), 2010

BA Hampson, JM Morton, PC Mills, M.G. Trotter, D.W. Lamb and CC Pollitt

Distances travelled by feral horses in 'outback' Australia.

Accepted for publishing EVJ, 2010

B.A. Hampson, M.A. de Laat, P.C. Mills and C.C. Pollitt

Environment does not effect equine hoof wall moisture content.

In review, EVJ, 2010

B.A. Hampson, M.A. de Laat, P.C. Mills and C.C. Pollitt

Large range of morphometric variables and high incidence of pathology in the feet of Kaimanawa feral horses.

AVJ 88(4), 2010

Brian Hampson, Glenn Ramsey, Alison Macintosh, Paul Mills, Melody de Laat, Chris Pollitt

Sole depth and palmar surface weight bearing characteristics of the Equine foot.

Accepted for publishing AJVR, 2010

Brian A Hampson, BHMS, B. Appl Sci (Physiotherapy), PhD Scholar, Alexandra D Connelley, BVSc, Melody A de Laat, BVPhD and Chris C Pollitt, BVSc, PhD.

The effect of environment on the feral horse foot.

(In draft)

BA Hampson, MA de Laat, PC Mills and CC Pollitt

Variation in the primary epidermal lamellar density between Australian feral and domestic horse fetal hooves.

Accepted for publishing AJVR, 2010

Brian A Hampson, BHMS, B. Appl Sci (Physiotherapy), PhD Scholar, Melody A de Laat, BVSc, PhD Scholar, Paul C Mills, BVSc, PhD and Chris C Pollitt, BVSc, PhD.

My Way or the Highway: The Trimmer's Dilemma

I said it once to a fellow trimmer in jest: “my way, or the highway”.

So when I hear the phrase repeated back to me time and again as a description of how I “roll”, I have to laugh. But “my way” constitutes the sum of my knowledge, and my ability to rehabilitate horses and keep them sound barefoot. In a nutshell, “my way” is what it takes to make this work.

Early in my trimming career, eager to build a business and help as many horses as I could, I was not so forceful about what needed to change to give the horse the best possible chance at good, healthy bare hooves. I would provide the owner with all of the information they needed to make the necessary changes. I would even repeat myself -- a lot. But I would continue trimming the horse, in spite of the lack of progress.

As the years ticked by, it became increasingly clear that the horses whose diets are inappropriate, horses who go days with manure wadded in their feet, who live in small pens and are largely sedentary, who need boots to ease the transition but it's too much trouble for the owner, simply don't improve. Not only is this frustrating, it reflects horribly on the whole idea of barefoot hoof care, and on me personally as a trimmer. Inevitably, these are the owners that wind up firing *me*, even though the fault does not lie within the trim. And that's just not okay.

Not every owner is in a position to do everything exactly right. In many cases, that's not a deal breaker. Sometimes the vets involved don't help much, either because they simply don't understand the nuances involved in keeping a barefoot horse one hundred percent sound, or because they know as well as I do that many owners simply don't want to work that hard. And then there are all of the naysayers at the barn, telling you you're crazy, that you should shoe your horse, that thrush doesn't hurt, that boots are dangerous, that you're cruel to expect the horse to survive barefoot. It takes a lot of conviction to go against all of this criticism, I know. But I also know that if you do it right, it absolutely works, and the result is a healthier, happier horse.

These days, if a new client approaches me with a horse that suffers from chronic issues, they'd better be ready to implement the changes I prescribe if they want me to work on the horse.

Aspiring trimmers are always concerned about building a full roster as quickly as possible. But my best advice is to build a roster full of clients that truly want to get it all right. Screen them well, and be adamant about every aspect of the horse's care. And never hesitate to fire clients who aren't willing to do what it takes.

THRUSH NINJA!

Finally...an easy, effective way to both treat and prevent thrush!

Ever since I became obsessed with hooves, I've been experimenting to find the very best treatment for thrush (equine digital dermatitis). While the colloquial name "thrush" makes most people think of candidiasis, or a yeast infection, in truth, equine thrush is a bacterial infection of the soft tissue in the foot. The culprit is almost exclusively manure, which harbors the bacteria. In a perfect world, manure would never accumulate in the foot; horses naturally will avoid stepping in manure given the freedom to do so. But in our often cramped and artificial horsekeeping environs, this is almost impossible for our domestic horses, and so the manure indeed becomes wedged in the foot. And the instant it becomes lodged in the central sulcus or collateral grooves, the damage begins.

It's easy to see this: any time you pick manure out of a horse's foot, you'll notice the adjacent frog has literally begun to be eaten away. There may be no overt thrush, but there is indeed decay...and even this early decay is hugely damaging to the frog, and can impact soundness.

There are hundreds of products marketed to kill thrush. Unfortunately, most are extremely harsh, and while they will kill the offending bacteria, they also kill the adjacent living tissue.

The result, at worst, can be a rebound effect; at best, it kills the thrush, but leaves sensitivity in its wake.

Barefoot trimmers are ever looking for a better remedy for the problem. A combination of over-the-counter human anti-fungal and anti-bacterial products may work in some areas. Essential oils, with their well documented anti-microbial properties, can be effective if used diligently in combination with scrubbing the foot with a grease-cutting dish detergent. And hoof scrubbing and coating with zinc oxide ointment was, until recently, the most effective treatment I had found for horses in my area. Until now...



Three weeks of daily use, in conjunction with appropriate trim, can produced frogs like this!

Making thrush treatment easy is absolutely paramount to success. Determined to find a treatment that was easy enough for anyone to do daily, I began experimenting with some of the ingredients I knew to be effective. Finally, I came up with a recipe that works!

Non-toxic, non-necrotizing, and non-staining, with no offensive odor, Thrush Ninja! is an aqueous solution designed for daily use to cure and prevent both thrush and white line

disease. Safe to use on shod feet as well as barefoot hooves, it's as simple as picking the hoof clean, and spraying liberally with Thrush Ninja! Within 7 days of daily use, you'll see a tremendous improvement in the health of your horse's frogs. Spray your horse's feet daily, and you will never deal with thrush again!

Go to <http://www.thrushninja.com> for more information.

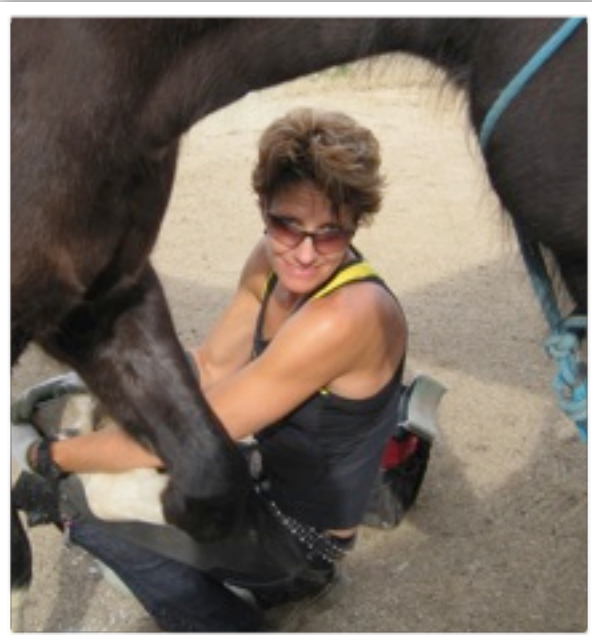
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About Maria Siebrand

& The Thoughtful Horseman...

With a background in the life science and pharma industries, and a determination to make life better for our domestic horses, Maria brings a science-based approach to horsekeeping, equine nutrition, and the field of barefoot hoof care. She offers barefoot hoof care services, nutrition consultations and diet formulation, horsemanship coaching, as well as a line of supplements formulated to fit the typical Southern California equine diet.

Maria is available for clinics, lectures, and mentorships on barefoot hoof care and progressive horsekeeping practices.



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P.O. Box 181472

Coronado, CA 92178