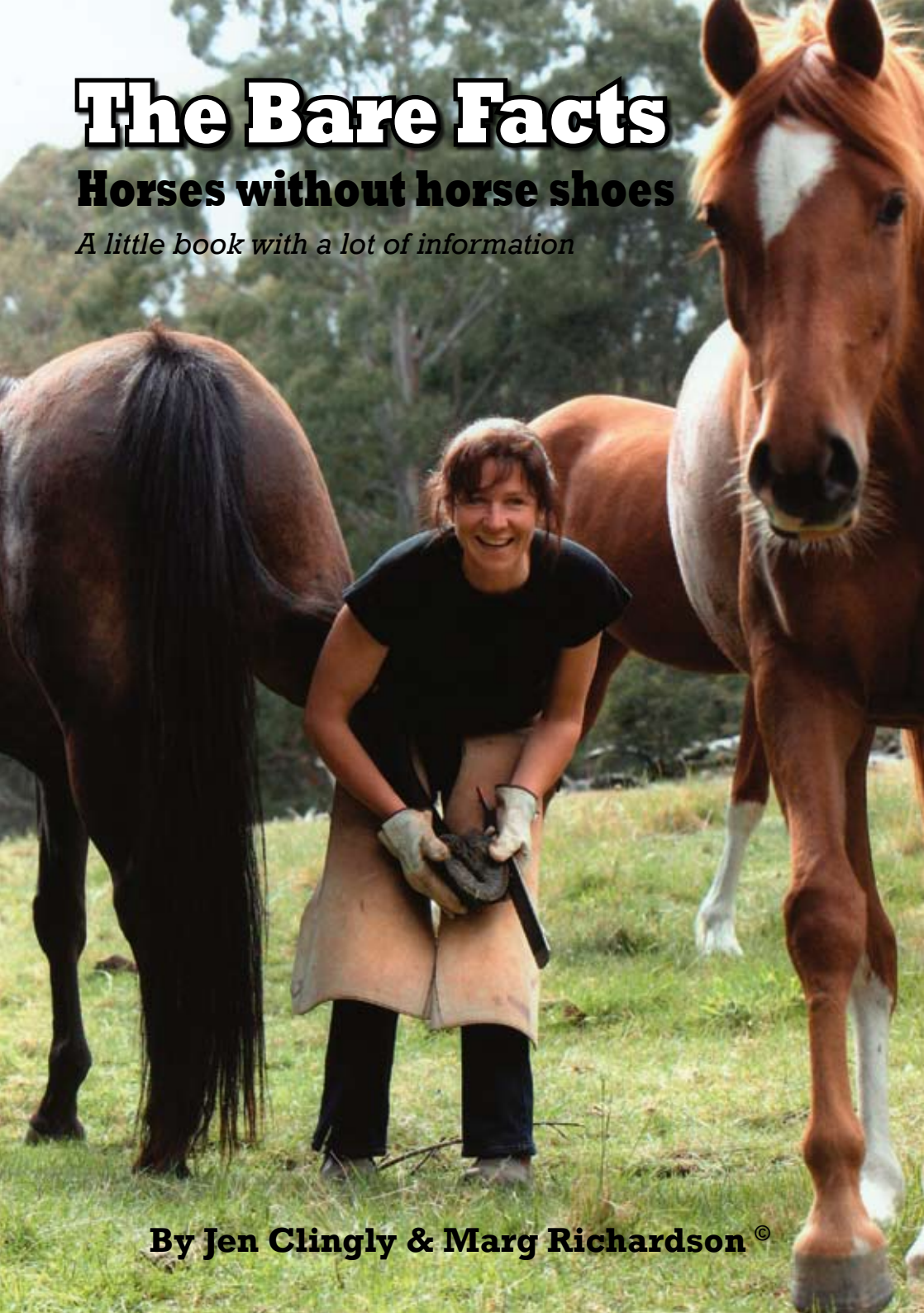
The Bare Facts

Horses without horse shoes

A little book with a lot of information



By Jen Clingly & Marg Richardson ©

The Bare Facts - Horses without Horseshoes

The horse's hoof is a marvel of the natural world. The study of the equine hoof has been more controversial than any other part of the horse's anatomy.

Horse shoeing has always been an unquestioned tradition. Humans have been nailing horse shoes onto horses' hooves for over 1000 years. The history of the horse shoe is unclear. But it appears they were invented sometime in the Middle Ages to protect the hooves of horses used by soldiers to travel over rough terrain, as often the hooves were compromised when horses were kept in stables standing in their own waste.

In this day and age most owners continue to keep their horses shod. After all, this has always been customary – can you remember back to a time otherwise?

<u>Why do people shoe their horses?</u>

The answer is always the same: most horse owners assume that their horse's hooves are too weak and too sensitive to go unshod. Or they believe that high performance horsemanship is only possible if the hooves are given the type of support that only horseshoes can provide.

However horse owners and trainers around the world are discovering there is a way to go without shoes and have their horse perform in any discipline with success and soundness.

Jen Clingly & Imaj Zamir (pictured) completing 160km endurance ride barefoot.

It's not just keeping a horse barefoot. It means a change in long-standing beliefs about what is correct horse keeping.

Think about the horse – both wild and domestic

Little research has been done on wild horses in an attempt to understand the hardiness of these horses and their tough hooves and how that information can be used to improve the quality of life of our domestic horses. Fortunately Australia is now conducting major research with the Australian Brumby Research Unit with Brian Hampson and Prof. Chris Pollitt from the University of Queensland - www.wildhorseresearch.com

Many of our domestic horses today live completely differently from their wild cousins. They are usually kept in tidy, small paddocks that are cleaned of rocks so they won't bruise their feet, fed high off the ground, often kept on their own to stop them getting kicked or bitten, fed one or two big meals a day, rugged - and they are shod.

For generations people have been taught to believe it is the correct and only way to look after their horse properly … but is it? If your horse could talk, do you think these are the things he would ask for? Have you ever wondered that just because that is the way it has always been done – is it the right way?

Would the horse be happier and healthier another way? Think about it. The biological makeup of the horse has ensured his survival for millions of years.

INTRODUCTION

"All too little attention has been made to the natural foot. That's the way he was made, that's the way he should go."
- Equine Vet, Dr James Rooney in his book "The Lame Horse"

What is natural hoof care?

Natural hoof care is looking at the whole horse and trying to give your horse a natural lifestyle or, in other words, trying to mimic the environment and way of life he would have if he were a wild horse.

People who become interested in natural hoof care simply want what is best for their horses. Many have been on a downward spiral of constant lameness or chronic hoof problems. Some start because their horse has had upper body problems stemming from poor hoof form or had trouble with forging, brushing, gait irregularities, sore feet etc. others try it as a "last resort" and are amazed at the results.

This little booklet contains information about:
- Feed
- Environment
- Hoof Care
- Booting
- Movement/exercise

It will help you make informed decisions about the lifestyle of your horse.

Natural hoof care should never compromise your horse's health, well being and comfort !!

An experienced natural hoof care practitioner will advise you on all aspects of natural hoof care and will be able to fit your horse with boots if required. Then your horse is still bare when he is at rest and only "booted" when he is doing his serious work!

FEEDING THE HORSE

The horse has a small stomach that is designed to process small amounts of food high in roughage all day long as it continually moves, not big meals once or twice a day. Most lush green pasture is too high in sugars, and more suited for cattle than horses. Feed impacts on many facets of equine health and soundness, especially the hooves.

- Horse's feed requirements are simple. They need free choice to roughage – grass hay and pasture and required minerals. Rich green pasture should be avoided. A diet too rich in sugars/carbo-hydrates can and does cause laminitis, even in skinny horses.

- Horses are designed to eat with their heads down to the ground and their necks straight. Keeping the horse's head low keeps the horse calm and comfortable. The brain releases "calming" messages to the horse whilst its head is down - this has been proven in horse training. It is also the best way for a horse to clear the sinus passages and bronchial tubes from irritants. A horse eating with his head down has correct jaw alignment for wear of teeth.

MOVEMENT FOR THE HORSE

Freedom of movement is vitally important to horses. They need room to move, a shelter or trees to get out of the weather. Varied terrain helps keeps hooves tough.

- Horses are "prey" animals - animals of flight! They feel more secure out in open spaces where they can see and hear danger coming. Keeping them in stables or yards on their own makes them nervous and bored. Sometimes the only way they can see other horses is by keeping their head up high. This nervous stress and un-natural head position can lead to all sorts of problems – ulcers, colic and behavioural problems.

- Horses are herd animals. They feel safe with other horses. Keeping horses in a herd reduces stress and promotes psychological well-being as they interact with each other – grooming, playing, grazing and resting together.

There is nothing sadder than a horse on its own - a horse that lives in a herd is a happier and safer horse!

- Stables restrict movement. Confinement can lead to pacing, pawing, swaying, gnawing, windsucking and other undesirable habits. Stables are often bedded in shavings which may dehydrate the hooves and are too soft for healthy hoof function. They may also cause respiratory problems.

- By keeping the horse in a situation where it can move and stand in or under shelter allows the horse's natural thermoregulation and natural coat growth to keep the horse warm in winter and cool in summer. Access to plenty of roughage will also help the horse to keep adequately warm. Unnecessary overheating with the misuse of rugs is very bad for any horse. Common sense needs to be practiced if a horse has a genuine need for a cover.

- In nature horses move to survive – grazing and moving from predators. They also have to move over hard terrain which helps to toughen up their hooves. Give your horse as much space to move as possible – be imaginative – instead of a square paddock, give him a track around the paddock – this will enable you to control what he eats and where he walks and give him some interest – put some gravel down where he has to walk for healthy tough hooves, some sandy rolling places, access to water, spread the hay along the track to keep him moving, include shady places and shelter from the weather.

- Constant movement is natural for a horse. A horse living outside in an average paddock will move approx 6-8 km per 24 hr and more in a larger paddocks; a horse living in a stall will move approx 2 km per 24 hrs. In the wild, horses can cover up to 30 km every day.

Young horses with plenty of room to move establishes healthy hooves from birth

HOOF CARE FOR THE HORSE

Bare hooves (pictured) after a 110km endurance ride. Imaj Zamir owned by Jen Clingly.

Every horse can remain unshod. It is a common belief that the only option is to shoe our horses for protection or their feet will break away, wear down too fast or that the horse will become unsound.

Horses can be ridden barefoot if the hooves are conditioned and trimmed correctly and the horse is given the correct environment to live in. If the hooves are not ready or capable of tackling the tougher terrains then hoof boots are applied for the ride. Then your horse can be barefoot for the rest of the time!

There are endless reasons why your horse will benefit from being unshod – here are just a few …

- Correct and regular trimming and a natural lifestyle encourages tougher, stronger, healthier hooves. Regular and correct trimming helps to combat common hoof problems such as contracted heels, thin soles, navicular syndrome, pedal osteitis, long toe, crushed heels, seedy toe, bruising and corns.
- Horses with sound healthy hooves are surefooted - they can feel where they put their feet, including treading on rocks. By forming a healthy balanced hoof, problems such as tripping, stumbling, brushing, forging can be resolved when the hoof is at a natural length, physiologically sound and the stride and gait is natural.

Regular trimming
– an important part of your horses life

If your horse has not been trimmed or shod correctly/regularly and has not had an optimal lifestyle, has thin soles, flat feet or other common problems, boots should be fitted for the "transition period" (period of time for your horse to grow and develop healthy hooves).

Selecting the appropriate boot for the job should enable you to continue doing all the things that you were doing before without the horse being uncomfortable. This includes endurance riding, pony club, etc. Some horses can have the shoes taken off and experience no tenderness at all; some take months and some horses always need boots for protection when being ridden. Occasionally some horses may simply need time out in the paddock to recover from severe hoof problems.

You may find however that your horse can be ridden without boots a lot of the time during the transition period over certain terrains eg soft footing, grass etc.

Morgan stallion Twinhill Ronaldo with John Gorman driving showing you can do anything in boots

HOOF CARE PROGRAM FOR YOUR HORSE

The Trim is simply one small aspect of success in having a healthy rideable barefoot horse. But regular trimming is an important part of natural hoof care to get tough, sound, lame free hooves. So find an experienced hoof care professional to give your horse a functional and optimal trim to get your horse on the road to strong, healthy feet, competent and capable in performance.

You will find your trimmer is not only keen to look after your horse's hooves but can also help with information about natural horse keeping. Your trimmer may also be a trained boot fitter and can assess, fit and supply you with boots that best suit your riding.

If you decide you wish to start trimming your own horses, there are several courses you can undertake in Australia. There are also many weekend and one day clinics run by professionals such as www.wildabouthooves.com.au You can also find some great internet sites which help you such as those listed at the end of this book.

Julie Scott competing on her unshod horse

Going barefoot is a big change from what most of us have been taught about how to care for a horse.

But while it is a big adjustment to make, it is extremely rewarding, and the result will keep you far more in tune with your horse, enhance your relationship and will take your riding and horsing around to a whole new level.

Be aware of the importance of trimming foals and establishing healthy hooves early <u>with a natural lifestyle</u>

"Shoeing is a necessary evil" is a quote from many horseshoeing textbooks. For many years, nailing on a metal horseshoe on the bottom of the hoof has been the undisputed modality for protecting the hoof.

The adverse effects from incorrect and irregular shoeing include, but are not limited to: separation of the hoof laminae by the nail, lack of frog support, and contracted heels, stopping development of young horses' hooves, corns, long toe/low heel syndrome, thin soles.

Applying metal shoes to the bottom of horses' feet has continued because there have been no good alternatives for protecting the hoof. Until now…..

HOOF BOOTS

Convenient and ready to go whenever you are
Boots are the perfect option for hoof protection!

These days, horses can be fitted with boots that protect hooves from excess wear, bruising and concussion. Current technology has provided us with many choices of hoof boots which have been designed with the performance horse in mind and are a genuine alternative for hoof protection.

Boots are also an ideal tool to help the horse to heal from common hoof problems such as laminitis and founder, navicular syndrome, quarter cracks and contracted heels by protecting the hoof and allowing the natural physiology of the hoof to work to heal itself.

The benefits of the boots

- A hoof fitted comfortably inside a boot made of tough, flexible materials is free to expand, contract and torque side to side with each step. The hoof is meant to spread on weight bearing. It is the natural shock absorbing feature of the hoof. A booted horse also has much less concussion as the hooves are supported by a rubber base.
- Most horses will transition successfully to barefoot by using boots. There should be no "down time" as your horse can be ready for work by quickly donning a pair of boots. Boots can be slipped on where the terrain is too tough for the condition of the hooves at any time.
- Some horses may always need protection whilst ridden and the perfect option is a set of boots.
- If you are planning on a long distance ride – boots can be fitted to protect the hoof from excess wear. But they can then be taken off again once your ride is finished!
- Hoof boots make horses comfortable enough to land heel first, importantly allowing the correct biomechanics, and stopping the damaging effects of incorrect limb loading during locomotion which can be caused by pain in the hooves.

- Boots can withstand rocky terrain and miles of riding – some report up to 1500 km.
- Easy to use. Quick to fit. A person familiar with the boots can have them fitted in less than one minute. It is important that the boots fit well. If unsure, have them professionally fitted.
- Boots are a cheap alternative when you consider how long they last!
- Horses often only need to have boots on the front hooves as these bear approximately 70% of a horse's body weight.

"Boots are the most appropriate option for the distinguishing horse person when added hoof protection is desired. They complement the functions of the hoof rather than antagonizing it—this is the bottom line."
- Dr. Tomas Teskey - DVM

ALL HORSES ARE PRONE TO LAMINITIS

Laminitis is extremely common and often the owner is unaware of a mild laminitic attack. Put simply, laminitis is inflammation of the sensitive laminae in the hoof, causing a breakdown of the bond between the hoof wall and the coffin bone inside. When rotation occurs it is called Founder.

Common cause of laminitis is eating rich, green grass and excessive weight gain. But it can also be caused by concussion of the hooves on hard surfaces (road founder), over-eating grain, infection from retaining afterbirth, excessive weight bearing on one leg, stress, medications, and as a result of irregular trimming/neglect.

Signs of laminitis:

- Reluctance to move freely, may appear lazy
- Prefers to canter rather than trot.
- Moves forward soundly but take slightly shorter than normal strides.
- Feet are off balance - may have long toes, high heels or both.
- Sound on soft terrain but may limp or stumble on hard or rocky ground.
- Pulse and respiration may be elevated due to pain.
- Sole bruising and a stretched white line (in some horses, by the time you see this they have been compromised for quite some time).
- Blood stains visible in the white line

Late clinical signs: (Founder)

- Lies down a lot or, if standing, will not move
- Distorted hoof capsule
- Bounding digital pulse
- Sole hot to the touch
- White line stretched
- Will not allow you to pick up a foot
- Stops eating
- Sole bruise in the shape of a coffin bone
- Shifting weigh from foot to foot (swaying side to side).
- Standing with front legs stretched out, back arched, trying to lean back to get weight off toes.
- When asked to turn, the horse rocks backwards onto haunches, lifts head up and lurches around because it hurts to turn the feet.

All of the signs need to be evaluated in context. No single indicator would be a diagnosis for laminitis.

- If you suspect a laminitic attack (bounding digital pulse, warm hooves) soak in ice water immediately - 15-30 mins every few hours for several days
- Find out the cause and remove horse from it
- Consult with your veterinarian for pain management
- Provide free choice low sugar grass hay or soaked hay if sugar content is not known. No grain.
- Provide minerals and salt lick
- Provide company of other horses
- Encourage movement when able, don't confine
- Put the horse on soft footing
- Get regular trims from a professional trimmer (every 3-4 weeks).
- Use boots with pads if the horse is too sore to walk and when ready to ride during the healing phase
- Prevent it happening again – control your horses diet and keep it moving. Also check out www.safergrass.org for help on what to feed your horse.

Websites

www.wildabouthooves.com.au
www.ahca.org.au
www.easycaredownunder.com.au
www.barehoofcare.com
www.healthyhorsesnaturally.com.au
www.bareequine.com.au
www.gobarefoot.com.au
www.gormanhorse.com.au
www.barefoothooves.com
www.equinerehab.co.nz
www.hoofrehab.com
www.hoofworksaustralia.com
www.naturalhorseworld.com
www.barefoothorse.com
www.tribeequus.com
www.safergrass.org
www.wildhorseresearch.com
www.cavallo-inc.com
www.aebm.org.au

Books

Ramey P "Making Natural Hoof Care Work For You"
Jackson J "Horse Owners Guide to Natural Hoof Care"
Laidley P "Hoof Works: Barefoot Basics: Interactive cd
Strasser H "A Lifetime of Soundness"
Jackson J "Paddock Paradise"
Camp J "The Soul of a Horse"

Qualification

Diploma
www.nctm.com.au/webapps/site/66968/78124/info/info-page.html?info_id=162693
National Trade Certificate III
www.tafe.tas.edu.au/courses/natresforest/Equine_Hoof_Care.htm

The Authors
– Jen Clingly and Marg Richardson

Jen Clingly is a passionate advocate for the promotion and education of natural hoof care. Together with her horse Imaj Zamir they have completed 160km endurance rides barefoot and won and placed in numerous other rides. Jen and her partner Jeremy Ford are both professional trimmers and deliver trimming workshops and outback tours with their business "Wild About Hooves". Together Jen, Marg, Jeremy and Cynthia Cooper established Australia's first National Certificate III Qualification in Equine Hoof Trimming through TAFE www.tafe.tas.edu.au/courses/natresforest/Equine_Hoof_Care.htm

Marg Richardson is also a trimmer and endurance rider completing endurance rides successfully booted and barefoot. Marg has recently been involved with the current research with the Australian Brumby Research Unit through the Queensland University which she considers will be responsible for major breakthroughs in hoof research www.wildhorseresearch.com