

My Dog is Better Than Your Dog!

For some reason it is in the human nature that one must be wrong and one must be right; and the devil with Mr. In-between. In our world of horses and mules we see this too often. The current national dark weather front is in the controversy between to shoe or not to shoe. The bare-footers-only folks are driven by fear that they are doing something horrendous and eternally damaging to their animal's feet. This idea is fueled by a number of bare foot clinic givers, which have taken the opportunity to step away from common foot care practices and declare that the bare foot horse is the only way to go. I have followed their writings and theories of some of these folks with great interest, as I attempted to work my pack string bare foot for two years without success. This research has led me to wonder out the question "why and where has all of this come from".



My view from the saddle establishes the why and subsequent blame for the differences in this conflict with all of the players. The horse hoof boot makers will not make money if the status quo is left in the hands of the farriers alone. This requires that they, the boot makers, must find a

way to discredit the farriers. This is not hard to do, as the farriers have left the door wide open to attack by their traditional lack of communication skills. The best way to accomplish this profitable attack on farriers was to mount an attack from within their own ranks. This attack has come from a new wave of bare-footer clinic givers, who are profiting from the sale of books and their approved trimming tools for horse owners who wish to care for their own horse's feet. Additional profits are gained from the training of re-treaded farriers and laymen to hoof-care practitioners, all certified by the new barefoot gurus. Last but not least, we the horse and mule owners, which many of us are new to the large animal world, coming to it later in life. In many cases, we

lack the knowledge to make solid decisions about our animal's feet or are too intimidated to dig the needed information out of some of our silent and sultry farriers.

When hoof wear exceeds its growth and the animals must be used, then some form of protection must be applied to the foot. Barefoot only would be great, but man first nailed on a steel shoe over 1,000 years ago for this reason and that has not changed. This was so important and necessary, that it took place in a world steeped in poverty, when the metal for a shoe must have cost a small fortune. It is best that at rest or light work, the animal should be allowed to run barefoot. This is apparent in Chapter 1, Page 6 and 7 from "The Cavalry Horseshoer's Technical Manual", probably the most copied equine manual since Xenophanes ancient manual on equine care for the Persian Army. The use of steel horseshoes for hoof ware protection is where the modern battle field lies. This is clouded and confused even more by some bare footers alone, who gladly deny the potential for excessive wear by focusing on the wild horse foot. This is a real apples verses oranges argument.

Well for giggles, let us hear from Mr. In-between. In speaking for this normally ignored majority, I say, use what ever works best and does the least damage. If you can get along barefoot, this is great. If you need protection

for light work, a boot "may" give your animal's feet this protection. Be fore warned, in my experience, boots do not allow the toe to dig in when climbing steep loose surfaces, they are easily lost, rough terrain may damage them, without studs they may very easily cause a fall on wet slimy bridges or



rocks and may cause damage to the animals feet or pasterns. Also note that bare feet may slip easily on these wet slimy surfaces. Horses and mules are flatland critters and their feet did not evolve to climb around on such surfaces, if they had they would look like goats. It really gets some folks stressed at the

thought, that it is necessary to use a steel shoe for hoof protection if they have read anything on the use of a steel shoe, they can not get past the first chapter quoted above and into the need or process. To them, nail holes look ugly and that's that. To these folks I ask, if shoeing is in their book in-humane, then how in-humane is wearing out the animal's foot from use or putting them into dangerous environments without the proper traction necessary to travel safely. The properly applied shoe for the job and its subsequent removal, when not needed, is my final tool in the bag of tricks.

Where do we go from here? In an ever changing world, one must be very careful of what they wish for; the back lash may be dangerous. If this conflict gets out of hand, one of the players may decide to play the regulation card. This card can get the local or parent governments involved and the baby may be thrown out with the bath water. A good example is, that in England, it is against the law for anyone, not licensed as a farrier, to trim or shoe a horse or mule even if you own the critter, you can not legally maintain their feet yourself. In a perfect or at least better world, all parties would work together. The hoof care practitioners would refer to the farrier, when it is obvious that the foot was not going to transition in time for heavy use. The farriers would push for more bare foot time in lieu of continuous shoeing. The methods of trim or shoeing would be a subject of choice between the owners, farriers or hoof practitioners, working it out through a communication process, bringing them into a joint agreement. I would organize the curriculum for all shoeing schools, to guarantee that all future farriers are aware of the consequence for their actions on the shoeing world at large and also require classes in communication to assist them in this endeavor.

The modern horse and mule owner is stuck between two worlds, the old one using animals as a tool and the modern touchy feely one, where a critter is a status symbol from the past. No matter what, in both camps of thought, the most important focus must be on the care and comfort of the animal.

Ed Haefliger

Member: Back Country Horsemen of Washington, Capital Riders Chapter

Volunteer packer for:

Olympic National Park

Olympic National Forest

Washington State Capital Forest DNR