

BARE FOOT TRIMMING

By Pat Thacker, RJF, President Idaho farriers network

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The bare foot movement is one of the best things to happen for today's horse. However, some times the bare foot fanaticism present today is not realistic or humane for all horses. Let me first state that I am a HUGE bare foot advocate. Nothing allows a horses foot more opportunity for healing than going bare foot on natural habitat.

But we must first make sure that our horse is a good candidate for bare foot use. Make sure the horse does not have too much internal pathology or remedial damage from prior use in his/her life.

For example, a horse with severe pedalosteitis or old coffin bone fractures simply may never be able to tolerate being bare foot again. A simple radiograph or veterinary exam can shed much light on the internal bony condition of an individual horse. I recently put Natural balance shoes and pads on a nine-year-old paint mare that has painfully been trying to go bare foot for 2 years. The mare has almost no Developed Digital cushion [see Bowkers research] and upon radiographic evaluation the mare had mild pedalosteitis, and some navicular disease was present. This particular mare weighs about 1100 lbs. And has about ¼ inch of sole, which is inadequate sole depth for this mare to be comfortable and she continually, kept bruising her feet. The owner was ready to give up. After wearing the shoes and pads with frog supports for about one week the owner reported that the mare was a completely different horse and is sound and going well. Recently the mare returned from a pack trip in the sawtooth mountain range of central Idaho where the rocks are so sharp and prevalent that no horses can go through these jagged mountains bare foot. The owner was so thrilled that she called immediately upon her return to thank me for such a wonderful trip. She said she never would have believed that her mare could do such a trip just several months ago.

So how and when is bare foot appropriate? First some evaluation is necessary to insure that your horse is a good candidate. There is simply no reason to make a horse that is damaged or has inferior genetics of feet to suffer through an ordeal of trying to go bare foot if he/she simply can't.

The environment that the horse owner provides is also absolute imperative if a bare foot program is to be successful. No bare foot program will be successful if your horse is going to live on a swamp. An environment as close to a natural

environment must be provided in order to succeed.

I have other horses that can do 25 and 50-mile endurance races bare foot. However, these are light bodied Arabs and some larger tough footed Morgans. I also see Wild horses adopted from the BLM that do well with bare feet in some of these terrains. But these people use boots and condition these horse's feet for the terrain that they will be competing on. Many of these horses can go twenty-five miles with boots, but 50 miles seems to be a bit of a strain with the boots. Some of my most adamant bare foot client's still use shoes once or twice a year in the real long 50-100 mile races when the terrain is solid rock, like the Owyhee Mountain rides near Oreana, Idaho.

Remember that your horse is the one galloping through the rocks when he/she is bare foot. And if the horse has good tough quality feet and you can augment with boots stay bare foot as long as possible, but if your horse is struggling and tender footed you may be damaging your horses feet and could do permanent damage. Nothing is healthier than a bare foot horse, but be reasonable and listen to your horse.

I like the Natural Balance trim, By Gene Ovnicek, The Physiological trim by Dr. Bowker, and I think Pete Ramey has a good bare foot trim as well.

For more info go to www.hopeforsoundness.com. Or www.cvm.msu.edu/news/press/phytrim.htm, or www.hoofrehab.com/hoof_clinics_with_pete_ramey.htm. I provide training in all three types of trims in my clinics and classes as well.