

Baring the Sole

by Bethany A. Caskey

"Concern for the horse himself and his fate must always form the principal interest of all our technical endeavors . . . never forget this in the midst of your diagrams, formulas, fancy tools and equipment."

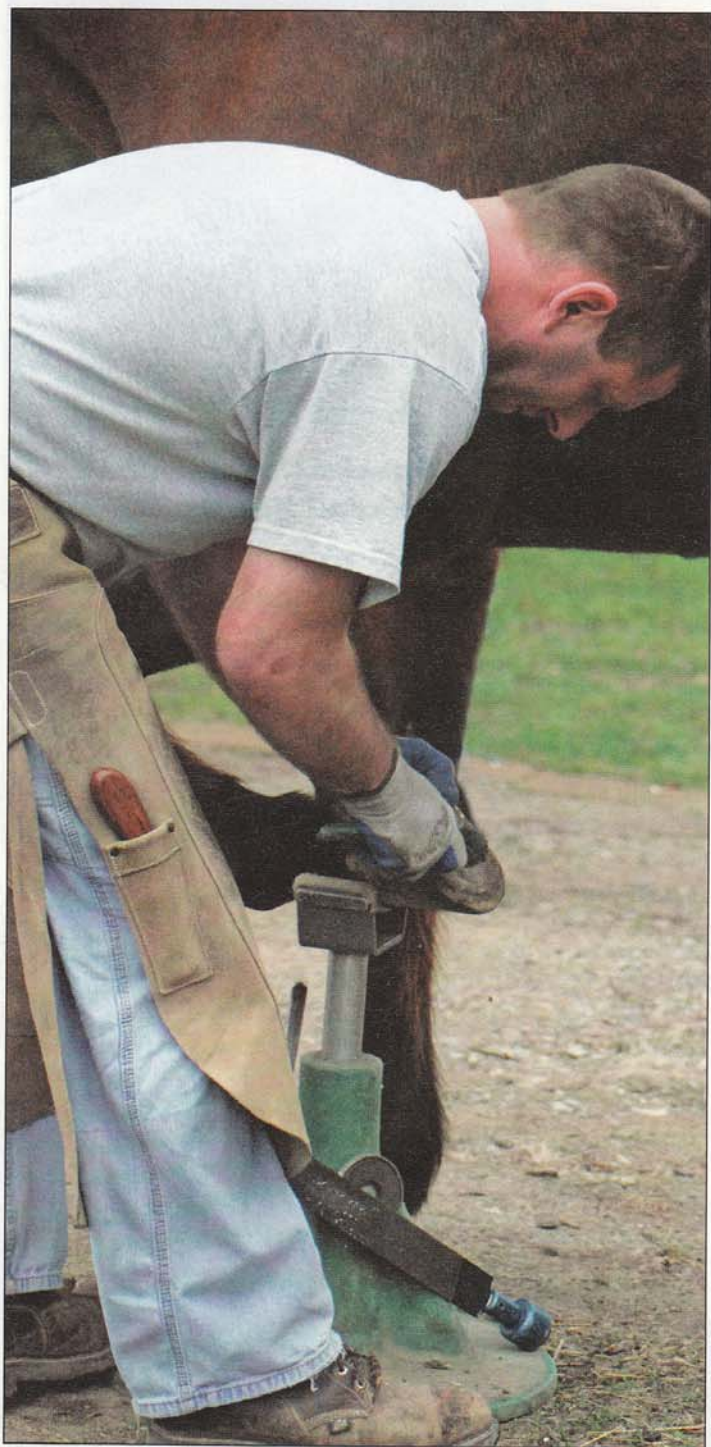
— Jaime Jackson,
Founding Member and President, AANHCP

The big bay mare stood quietly while the young trimmer cradled her foot against his bent knees. He carefully scraped the white powdery flakes from the sole of the foot with the hoof knife until he could see and feel fresh, firm sole.

The mare snatched her foot away and sat it on the ground. Silently, the trimmer stroked her leg and asked her to pick it up again. A few moments later, she snatched her foot back again. Again, there was no reprimand and no impatience from the young man. He simply asked for her foot again and continued to work. The mare tried having her own way with her foot a few more times. Meeting no resistance and not eliciting an emotional response, she soon left her foot in the trimmer's hands, and stood quietly while he carefully sculpted her hoof.

Dustin Gean of Colfax, Iowa, is a practitioner and member of the Association for the Advancement of Natural Horse Care Practices, or the AANHCP. The AANHCP is dedicated to promoting natural hoof care and horse keeping practices through education, training and advocacy programs. A pioneer in the natural horse care revolution, the AANHCP continues to be a leading global force for the humane care of domestic equines worldwide.

The leadership, training instructors, clinicians and practitioners of this organization are dedicated professionals and advocates with years of experience in addition to formal AANHCP education and training. They serve a wide range of equestrian activities and are united around the guiding principle of 'causing no



Dustin Gean at work on an Iowa horse farm.

Photos by Bethany Caskey



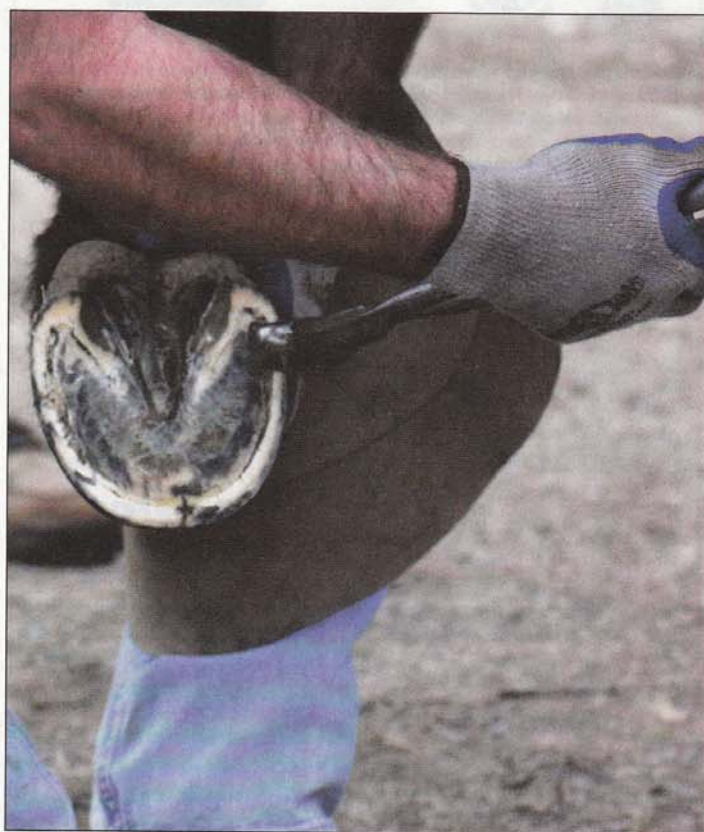
Dustin trims back the frog to the live tissue and cleans out the bars.

harm.' Dustin Gean manifests the dedication of these professionals, not only in his trimming techniques, but also his overall patience and attitude when working with the horses.

In the arena of hoof trimming and farrier work, it seems everything old is new again. Or rather, finding out that our human intervention into the functioning of the horse's hoof may need to take a few steps back in time. Our habits of trimming to a dictated pattern may need to take a lesson instead from nature and the horse itself.

Independent studies have shown that in the wild, horses rarely suffer from laminitis or navicular. Farrier Jamie Jackson promoted his personal findings in what he terms the 'wild horse trim.' The AANHCP was formed. The association dedicates itself primarily to the care of the horse's hoof as though it were not constrained by stalls and pastures.

Jaime Jackson's landmark studies of over 1000 wild horse hooves found universal traits that are encouraged through specialized trimming methods. Wild horses forge hooves that carry them carefully, surefooted and soundly up to 20 miles a day on tough, rocky terrain. The theory is that your horse can grow its own strong,



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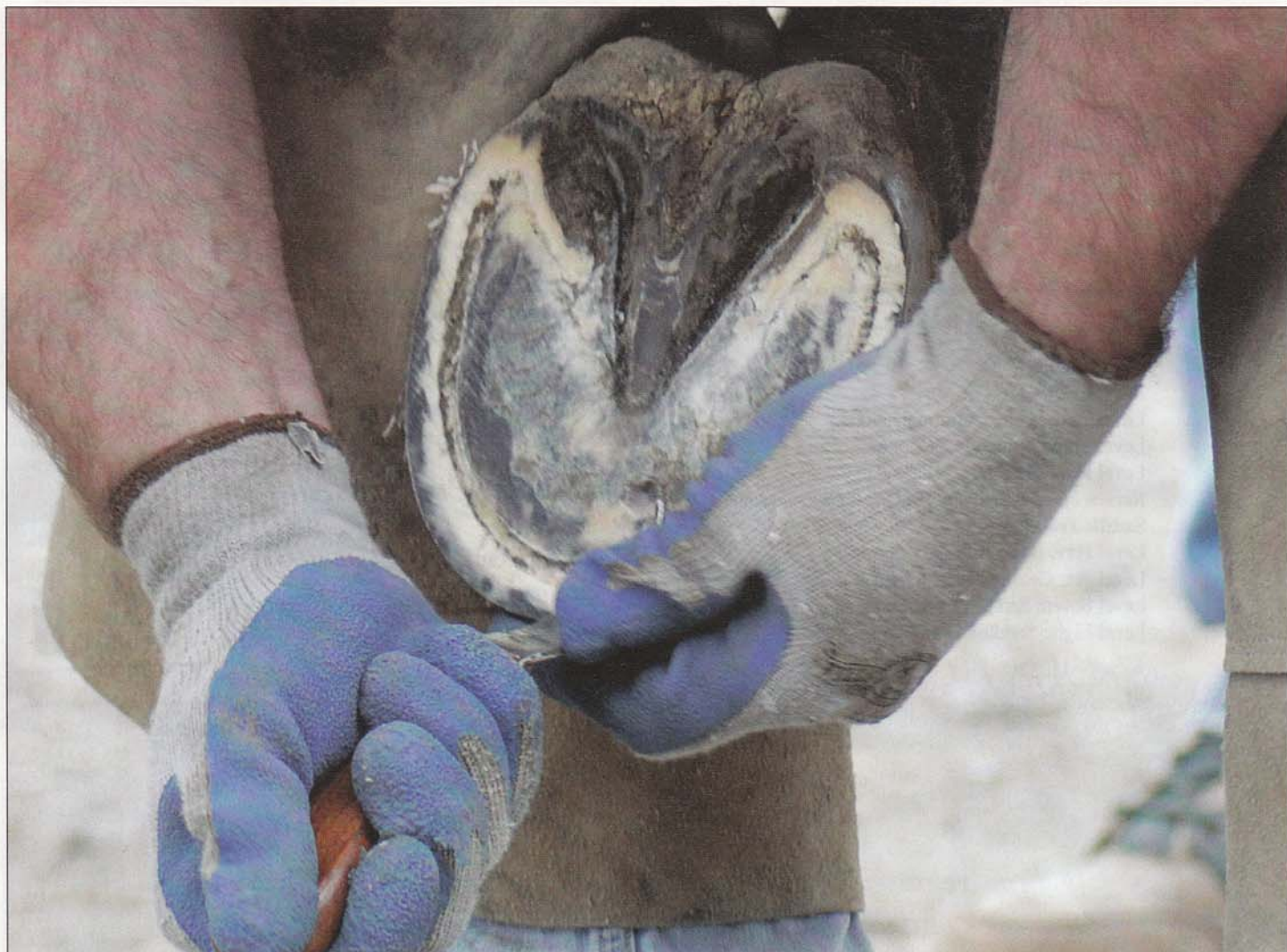
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Sighting down the edge of his rasp, Dustin compares the two sides of the trimmed foot for differences.

healthy natural hoof. The 'wild horse trim' is non-invasive and encourages strong, healthy hooves. Done every 4-5 weeks, on average, the trimmer removes only what nature would remove in the wild.

Natural hoof care promotes a natural lifestyle for your horse. In addition to the natural trim, the horse must be provided with movement. For the most part, the horse is a creature of wide-open, dry plains and mountain slopes, with the exception of the wide-footed breeds of northern Europe, which adapted to living in marshes. The wild horse's food is the dry, sparse bunch grasses of low-rainfall areas, and a variety of herbs, shrubs, roots



Scraping the white powdery flakes from the sole of the foot with the hoof knife until he can see and feel fresh, firm sole.

and bark. It was not the lush, green pastures we usually provide for them today.

Wild horses walk daily about 20 miles to find food, water, minerals, herbs, and shelter. This walking and movement wears and shapes their feet to perfection. Horses have lived this way for millions of years. The horse is a successful species and the design works.

The 'wild horse trim' is also known for the 'mustang roll.' In his book, *The Natural Horse*, Jackson writes trimming instructions to create this rounded, beveled edge: "To finish the hoof without a shoe, the entire bearing surface of the outer wall must first be rounded off. Start with the rough side of a farrier's rasp, working the tool downward towards the ground, that is, obliquely against the grain of the wall's projected bearing surface. Next, using the fine side of the rasp, smooth down the loosened horn produced by the rough rasping." He also recommends following this up with fine sandpaper, to

really buff the hoof smooth. Jackson goes on to provide the actual definition of the mustang roll: "At the hoof wall's ground bearing surface, the outer wall will turn in a distinct, smooth radius of approximately one half inch; this is the 'mustang roll' and it is an important signature of both natural wear and natural trimming." Jackson recommends applying the mustang roll everywhere around the hoof wall, including the heel buttresses. He does warn against overdoing things, as excessive rasping can lead to "snubbing" the toe and weakening of the hoof wall.

In his 2003 book, *Making Natural Hoof Care Work for You*, farrier & barefoot advocate Pete Ramey recommends finishing the entire hoof wall with a mustang roll, using a 3/8 inch radius. "It is easiest to start the radius from the bottom with a rasp and then bring the hoof forward to finish. This makes hooves look beautiful to the eye..."



The entire bearing surface of the outer wall must first be rounded off.

For others who argue against rounding or beveling the wall on the rationale that this makes the hoof wall passive, Pete offers a good explanation: "At first glance, most farriers say, 'You're making the walls passive.' Standing square on concrete; yes I am, but on varied terrain and in motion, the walls are very much engaged. You wouldn't call the walls passive if you got your finger stuck between the bevel and a gravel road! When a horse is pushing off its toes, the walls are set up to work perfectly. It has been nature's plan all along and it works."

Here's how a typical *pasture trim* can make a horse sore:

- The heels are left long encouraging contraction, toe-first landings, and navicular pain.

- The toe callus is trimmed away and a thin sole can't protect the coffin bone.
- The bottom of the wall is left flat, as if preparing for a shoe. This encourages flaring in a barefoot hoof.
- Farriers tend to ignore a forward-flared toe and this leaves a stretched white line and poor coffin bone suspension, making the horse sore on gravel and on rocky trails.

Properly trimmed barefoot horses gain:

- Quality of movement. A light, naturally shaped hoof with an early breakover, allows the entire leg to move more freely and the foot to land heel-first.



Using the fine side of the rasp, smooth down the loosened horn produced by the rough rasping.

- Surefootedness. Barefoot hooves can feel the ground and have better traction.
- Stamina. The flexing hooves help provide blood circulation to the entire body system.

The AANHCP Trimming Guidelines attempts to enable their practitioners to "mimic" the admirable hooves of the wild horse, mule and burro. When adhered to properly, the Guidelines prevent invasive trimming practices and methods that leave excessive growth, which have a harmful effect upon the hoof's integrity. The Guidelines do not yield a "single trim" or a "cookie cutter" approach to trimming, rather

they facilitate the unique individual growth patterns of each horse.

The basics as described by Dustin are these:

Trim to the live sole plane. Ignore the pathology as if it is not there – it will grow out to match the horse. Use nothing but the sole as your guide, the foot always grows to what is on the ground. Keep 2mm of the "water line" (area between hoof wall and the laminae) touching the ground. Do not rasp away the "natural flare", it will grow out with proper trimming and rasping it will only weaken the hoof wall. Do not cut or nip the "mustang roll" from the top of the hoof. Do not change the foot, nature will or will not fix it. It is there for a reason. Just trim. Less is more.

For More Information

You can learn more about the AANHCP by visiting <http://www.aanhcp.net/>

Information on creating a Paddock Paradise can be found at <http://www.paddockparadise.com/>

Pete Ramey's information, how to articles, and links can be found at <http://www.hoofrehab.com/> His DVD series and book are available on his website or from the *Rural Heritage* bookstore.

Article: Is "Barefoot" an Option for Your Draft Horse? (1-10-06) Pete Ramey (Published in *Rural Heritage* Magazine)

Books by Jaime Jackson

The Natural Horse: Lessons From the Wild (1992)

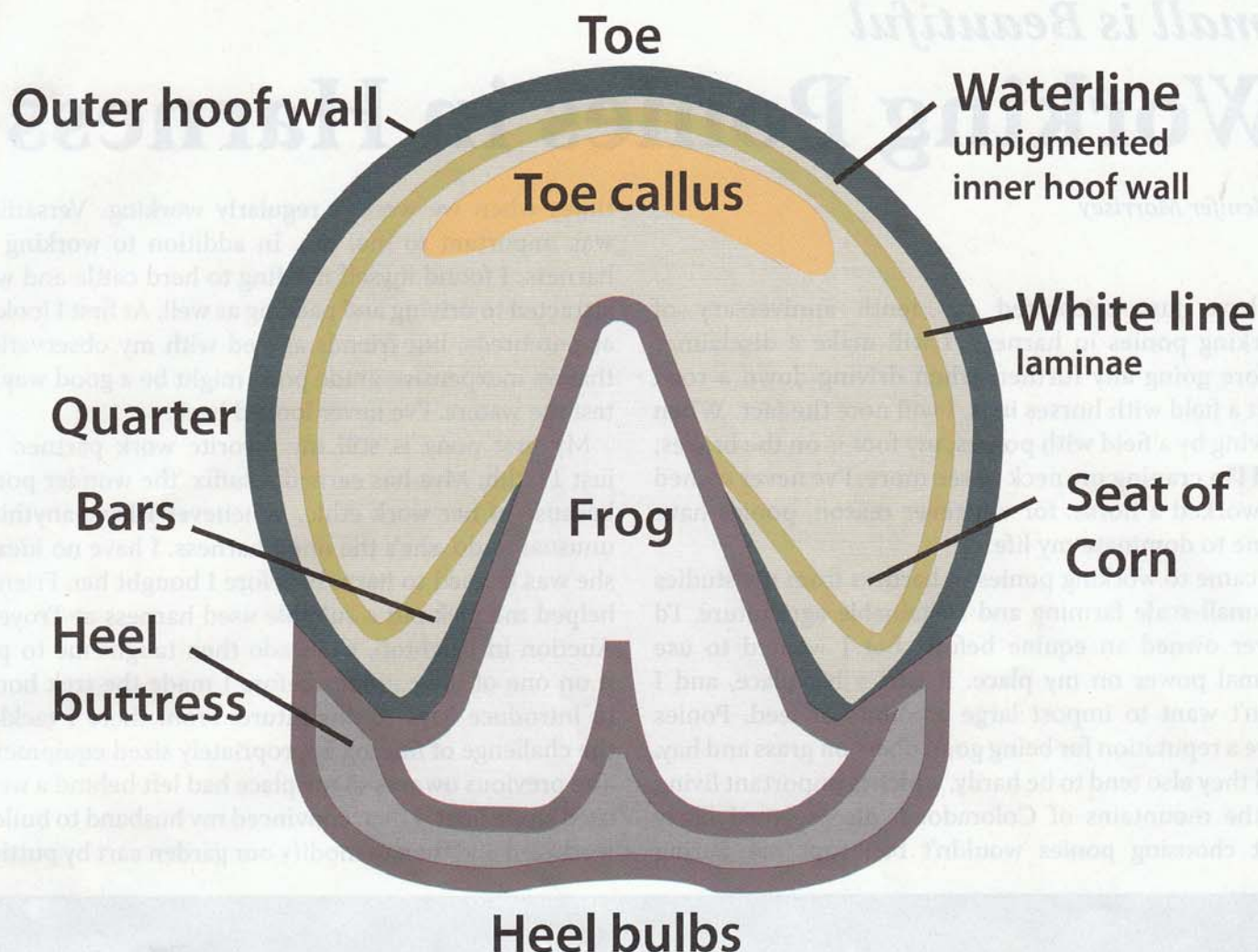
Horse Owners Guide to Natural Hoof Care (1999)

Founder: Prevention & Cure the Natural Way (2000)

Guide to Booting Horses for Hoof Care Professionals (2002)

Paddock Paradise: A Guide for Natural Horse Boarding (2006)

Handbook: Official Trimming Guidelines of the AANHCP (2006)



The "white line" is actually a yellowish color (or can be black with dirt if it is separated) when you rasp across it. The layer that looks white is called the "water line" and is the unpigmented inside layer of the wall.

Illustration by Bethany Caskey

The horse's hoof is a masterpiece of natural design and is built to handle incredible mechanical demands. We can help sustain it by providing "natural boarding" for our horses, as well as more natural trims, to help promote their health in captivity. "Paddock Paradise" is a term used for the creation of a more natural environment for the keeping of our horses and works in tandem with the wild trim methods in creating a sounder horse. The premise of a natural boarding model is to provide safe, humane, living conditions that use the horse's natural instincts to stimulate and facilitate movement and other behaviors that are essential to a biodynamically sound horse.

Ideally, natural horse boarding practices mean the horse is turned out 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with horses of all ages, sexes and temperaments. It is also ideal for the horses to have some access to shade as well as free access to some sort of shelter from rain and snow.

Bethany Caskey remembers growing up in rural Iowa without much worry about hoof trimming. The horses would be trimmed, maybe once, in the spring of the year, and the constant use on hard packed roads kept the hooves hard and worn. It was more of a problem to make sure they were not being worn too short than to ever worry about trimming excess.

