

HoovesN'



Horses

by Jaime Jackson

In launching this new series by Jaime Jackson, we wanted to start with an excerpt from *The Natural Trim: Principles and Practice*, which is largely based on research he conducted in the U.S. Great Basin from 1982 to 1986 and further by his nearly 40 years as a hoof care professional. Specifically, this excerpt is an abridged one and primarily from Chapter 5's "What is a Natural Trim?"

One reason we began in this manner was to attempt to 'set the stage' for subsequent articles that will focus on both the natural trim and natural hoof/horse care (NHC). At present, the misunderstandings about these topics are growing at the same rate as their popularity! The natural trim is not a generic term but one that describes a specific method modeled after the research and findings on the hooves of horses living in the U.S. Great Basin. Jackson, a former farrier, initially set out only to incorporate elements of the natural wear patterns from his research of the wild horses onto the horses he was trimming but it was in the response of the hooves that the natural trim method was born and developed over time.

Since the 1992 release of *The Natural Horse: Lessons from the Wild*, in which he shared his observations, findings and data, a number of barefoot trimming 'methods' have surfaced and many are highly concerning. Our hope is that this series will help to set the record straight on both genuine natural hoof/horse care and on the authentic natural trim method.

At the foundation of NHC is the understanding that in order for our domestic horses to be healthy and sound, they require a 'reasonably natural' diet and lifestyle that emulates the diet and lifestyle of their wild cousins serving as our model for hoof care. Unfortunately, many of the most widely accepted, traditional practices - from confinement and isolation of horses in small pens or stalls (cages) to

The Natural Trim



Jaime trimming just a 'sliver' of the hoof wall from the hind foot of 'Tess,' one of five horses living in a Paddock Paradise at the AANHCP field headquarters in Lompoc, California. Jaime refers to the rim of hoof wall - a characteristic of the hooves of wild horses as well - as 'nature's horse shoe.' Photo by Jill Willis

what and how we feed them or the unlimited grazing in lush, green pastures - contributes to their breakdown and the onset of diseases and disorders such as Cushings, EMS, laminitis, Navicular Syndrome, IR, etc. Happily, many conditions that had once been a death sentence for horses are now either reversible or manageable if we simply incorporate those NHC practices that we know to be appropriate for the species. - Jill Willis, J. Jackson NHC Services and partner, Institute for the Study of Natural Horse Care Practices

"The sound, healthy feet of the Great Basin wild horse define the natural state of the hoof and the foundations for natural hoof care. Thus, we must begin with a discussion of the "natural state," why it applies to domesticated horses and why the wild horse hoof is worthy of emulation. It seems reasonable to ask, "What does a "wild" hoof have to do with a "domestic" horse?" Often, I hear, "What applies to wild horses doesn't apply to domestic horses because they aren't wild and they don't live naturally." Of course, this type of logic is fraught with misunderstanding. While the science of how / when they arrived on our planet lies beyond the scope of this text, it is their relevance to their domesticated cousins that matters. Of significance for our purposes is that the modern horse (*Equus ferus caballus*) and his wild, pre-domesticated antecedent, *Equus ferus ferus*, form a single homogeneous group and are genetically indistinguishable from each other.

This fact is foundational to our work because what we do is based on their biological adaptation - yet another word inviting confusion!

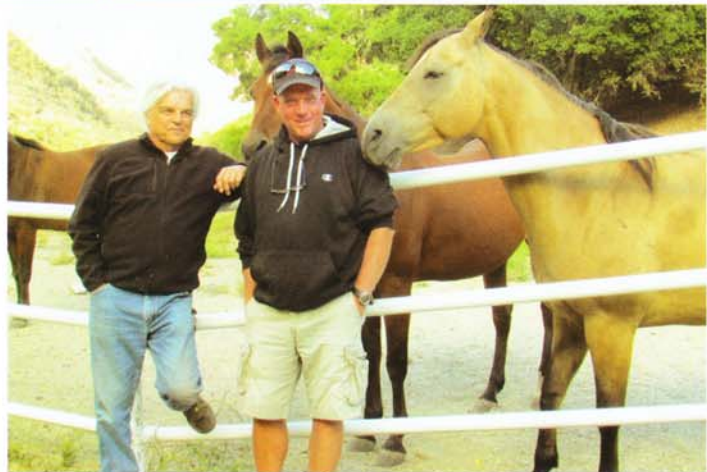
Many think adaptation means that someone or something 'adjusts' or becomes accustomed to something new or

different. Scientists define adaptation as the evolutionary process by which a population becomes better suited to its environment over many generations or tens of thousands of years. Adaptations occur through natural selection, the process by which those heritable traits that make it easier for an organism to survive and successfully reproduce become more common over successive generations. Thus, from an evolutionary standpoint of long term species stability, the wild horse foot, like the wild horse himself, is, very worthy of being a model to emulate.

Rejecting the value of "wildness" is foolish because it means rejecting the horse's biology! When we say a horse is "wild," all we're saying is that he isn't domesticated. (Another word that seems to cause confusion is the term feral. Wild horses are sometimes said to be "feral," which means they were domesticated but have returned to their wild state.) Nevertheless, they are all genetically derived from *Equus ferus ferus* and are one species. This is no different from camels, llamas, and elephants, all of which have known feral, wild, and domesticated lifestyles too. It is simply a matter of the effects of lifestyle and environment rather than biology.

(Note: Wild horses did not technically adapt to the Great Basin environment; these horses came from runaways and deliberate turn-outs, the first probably deriving from Spanish stock during the early exploration and colonization of the continent. In fact, scientists believe the species became extinct here some 10,000 years ago. It is thought that the unfavorable climate contributed to the horse's extinction, accelerated from over-hunting by early tribes of humans. And by the time the Spanish arrived in the American southwest, the region more closely resembled the semi-arid Eurasian steppes where *Equus ferus ferus* had long ago flourished and became domesticated. But my point is that these horses did not adapt to this environment, but the Great Basin once more "fit" the adaptation of the species. Thus, the hoof we see in the Great Basin today, is representative of that adaptation - what I have come to appreciate as the perfectly natural hoof.)

At the core of the natural trim which is defined as a humane, barefoot trimming method that mimics the natural wear patterns of wild, free-roaming horses of the U.S. Great Basin or similar adaptive biomes, is the word natural. Of course, this warrants more confusion. Can anything be natural when human "intervention" is



Houston Police Mounted Patrol Unit Officer Gregory Sokoloski has been a visitor to the AANHCP field headquarters on several occasions. Here he is with Jaime in front of the lower paddock entrance that sits about 400' below the track. Photo by Jill Willis.



One of the horses living in the Paddock Paradise at the AANHCP field headquarters runs along a path on the track in Lompoc, CA. Photo by Marijke

THE FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE NATURAL TRIM:

1. *Leave that which naturally should be there.*

This refers to protecting and preserving the integrity of the basic structures of the hoof, such as the frog, bars, sole, and wall. This

aligns with "do no harm."

2. *Remove only that which is naturally worn away in the wild.*

Only that which would be worn away in the horse's wild state is what should be removed during the trimming process.

3. *Allow to grow that which should be there naturally but isn't - due to human meddling.*

If the hoof has already been over-trimmed, one must use restraint. In particular, refrain from removing needed epidermis to attempt matching an already

involved in the process? Arguably, the term natural has been so savaged that the answer must be "no!" However, when we rise to the laws of nature and apply common sense principles, the meaning stands firmly in place.

The adaptation of *Equus ferus caballus* is a constant undercurrent to anything done to the hoof. This force cannot be ignored; it must be understood and integrated. The natural trim, even with its own complex mechanics, cannot stand alone to bring the hoof into alignment. There

must be absolute adherence to two tenets: *Primum non nocere* (First, do no harm) and *Vis medicatrix naturae* (Respect the healing powers of nature). Nature's principles flow readily from these two admonitions. In addition, I have included in the trimming guidelines the "Four Guiding Principles," which are based on the wild horse model and connect us directly to nature's principles and the powerful forces of adaptation. I would never trim a horse's foot without these in mind at every moment.

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over-trimmed area as it only makes matters worse for the horse.

4. Ignore all pathology.

This warns trimmers not to focus on any pathology present or on any possible violations of the three previous principles but to look intuitively to healing that will come in time when adhering to NHC principles and practices. Pathology invariably takes care of itself when we do healthful things.

When natural wear patterns are diligently applied to the hoof at regular 4-5 week intervals, the natural trim triggers a cascade of integrated biodynamic forces that produce new growth and reinforce naturally shaped hooves.

This melding of forces is described as a reinforcing "cycle of form and function." In reality, it defines the specific role and limits of the natural trim. Briefly, the cycle is as follows:

1. The 'natural trim' mimics natural wear patterns of wild horse feet.

This is done regardless of the damage done to the foot. The Guiding Principles govern how this is achieved while respecting and incorporating the individual horse's unique conformational and other attributes that will influence future growth (size, shape and proportion).

Jaime Jackson Article for Horseback

2. Through mimicking the natural wear patterns, we stimulate natural growth patterns.

Immediately following the trim, the foot's sensitive (innervated) and vascular dermal structures respond by producing growth patterns that correspond to the natural wear patterns. This response seems to be driven genetically by the powerful adaptive force.

3. Natural growth patterns create natural hoof shapes.

The result is a hoof that, with other holistic interventions, becomes increasingly more naturally shaped with each trim.

4. Natural shapes facilitate the natural gaits.

The initial growth pattern response to the trim, having reached ground level after 1 hoof growth cycle, now provides a more naturally shaped hoof (size, shape, and proportion) and the horse can now move more naturally on his feet using his natural gaits. Horse owners can assist in this area by providing reasonably natural boarding conditions for their horses and becoming a more natural rider.

5. Natural gaits create natural weight-bearing forces.

The natural gaits now begin to organize and propel weight bearing forces as the horse moves more naturally on his feet. The feet receive and resist these powerful forces delivered by the natural gaits, and as

they do, the hooves are more naturally shaped. It is interesting to note that muscle groups, once organized around a less than natural or outright pathological hoof conformation also begin to transform. It is not uncommon to hear, "My horse looks entirely different!"



Jaime Jackson is the author of 5 books, a hoof care professional & natural horse care consultant. He is the founding member of the non-profit equine advocacy organization, Association for the Advancement of Natural Horse Care Practices (www.aanhcp.net) & the principle instructor for the Institute for the Study of Natural Horse Care Practices (www.isnhcp.net), which he and his business partner, Jill Willis, created in 2009. He can be contacted at jacksonaanbcp@gmail.com and his website is www.jaimejackson.com

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