

Before the Trim

Evaluation

Before we can look at how to trim the hoof, we have to evaluate the horse and the hoof. There is much more to barefoot trimming than a technique, a knife and a rasp. We have to consider the entire horse and pay close attention to his personal circumstances.

The following is a fairly complete accumulation of facts you may find helpful to do the individual situation complete justice.

Documentation



Owner:

Name, address, telephone #, e-mail address

Veterinarian:

Name, telephone #, e-mail address

Horse:

Name
Gender,
Year of birth
Height,
Color and markings
Current weight, and ideal weight
Occupation

Management

Stall
Box stall with run
Pasture or paddock – including size
Quality of terrain on which horse lives (hard/soft/hilly/level)
Pasture mates/ single kept
Nutrition
 Hay/forage
 Grain/concentrates
 Supplements

History

Years shod
What age first shod?
 What was the average time between trims or resetting of shoes?

Years with current owner

Years stall kept

How was the horse raised (lifestyle)?

At what age was the horse first ridden?

How was the horse used previously?

Previously taken rehabilitation measures?

Clinical signs (Symptomatology)

Owner's observation

Previous hoof care provider's observations

Pictures taken

Progress report

Veterinarian's

Observations

Diagnosis

Radiographs taken

Degree of lameness

Recommendations

Treatment

Prognosis

Your measurements

Width of hoof capsule at point of heel

Width of hoof capsule at widest point

Length of hoof capsule from heel to toe

Width of frog

Length of frog

Coronet angle

Overall condition of hoof

Your pictures

Observations of moving horse – gait analysis

Make up a form with the points you like to include and e-mail it to your client before you go and see the horse. That way they can fill it out and e-mail it back to you, which will save time at your actual appointment.

You have to schedule more time for a first trim appointment. You also may consider offering a (free) evaluation before you take a horse on. This gives you the opportunity to get to know the horse, the owner and the location. Once you have driven there you know the distance you have to calculate, you can assess how much time it may take to trim the horse and you can take the first set of pictures. This may give you a fair chance to set a price for your services. More about this in the chapter "Establishing your business as a Hoof Care Provider".

Why?

Sure, one can trim with less information and with a little luck the horse may be well. But to establish a solid reputation and a real life business you may want to have complete records and contact information if you need to call, text or e-mail to change appointments or send information. You may need that information later to collect payment for trimming. Don't forget to get mobile and home phone as well as alternative e-mail and websites. It is good to get to know the horse owner, what he/she is doing outside of keeping horses. It helps you to communicate with the owner and relate to him/her better.

Veterinarian: It is good to know who the veterinarian is and how to get in touch with him. This becomes really important if the hooves of a horse are extremely compromised.

Veterinarian: It is good to know who the veterinarian is and how to get in touch with him. This becomes really important if the hooves of a horse are extremely compromised.

Horse description: Even if you trim only a few horses, you may be in a situation where you have to pick the right one out of similar looking horses when the owner is not around to get him trimmed. It also makes for more intelligent conversation if you have a clear picture of the horse in question.

Management practices: This information may be helpful to make connections to the overall and hoof health of the horse.

If current weight and ideal weight are far apart, you may be able to help the owner or manager with nutritional or exercise modifications. Be sure to be tactful when making suggestions for change. Everyone is trying their best to take care of horses and some owners may see your suggestions for change as criticism.



When you make yourself familiar with the history of the horse, you get a clearer picture how realistic the expectations of the owner may be, and how realistic your own expectations may be. When you find out not only what the horse is used for, but also how many hours a week, he is used, the level of intensity etc. This may well determine how you trim this horse

Movement and herd life are critical for the wellbeing of the horse. He is only secure in a herd environment (at least one other equine). Healing and correct development of healthy hooves can in most cases only take place when the horse is free to move about.

Nutrition determines, beside some other factors, the health of the horse. Having not only the right diet, but also the correct eating habits, is crucial for the health and rehabilitation of any horse. You will find more information in the chapter about nutrition.

How many years a horse was shod, often determines not only the time frame of rehabilitation, but also how to proceed with the removal of shoes. It may or may not make sense to take the shoes off and attempt rehabilitation. More about this in the chapter "A Word about Shoes".

The longer the horse has been with the current owner the more likely will you get some decent history of the horse, from which you may be able to determine in greater detail the course for rehabilitative measures in case that would be necessary. A long term relationship also may have implications how much the owner is willing to do for this horse.

The information about management may have impact on the overall health of the horse. Horses who have been stall kept have more problems with weak walls, under run heels, and long toes. They also often exhibit dental problems through incorrect feeding practices. They may experience pain in the back and pelvic area through to extended head high position. More about that in the chapter "Maintaining the Healthy Horse".

What the owner observed in the past and where she thinks the horse is now will help to gauge the steps taken in future trimming. While we always like to think about the horse as being our client and one really should always do what is right for the horse, the owner is the one who hires and fires. Try to be respectful, observant and listen carefully to what they tell you about their horse.

You may not be the first barefoot trimmer to trim this horse. Try to get as much information as possible about the actions taken by the previous hoof care provider.

If the horse to be trimmed has already been seen by a veterinarian, try to get as much information as possible. To know the diagnosis made by the veterinarian can be very helpful. Working together with a veterinarian will always take the pressure off you. More about working relationships in the chapter "Working with a team".

Make notes about the overall condition of the hoof, write down the measurements. This is one of the many ways you can control the effectiveness of your trim.

You will learn all about taking pictures in the next chapter.

If at all possible, have someone walk the horse in a straight line away from you and towards you. Do this on soft and hard ground. If you detect any abnormalities, make a note of those and share them with the owner. Show the owner what you are talking about. Have someone walk and trot the horse across your view, so you can assess how he sets his feet, how much suspension he has and how sound he is at least in hand. You also may take the time to observe him under saddle or on the longline, although this is a bit out of the usual practice. If you are not quite sure how to evaluate a sound or unsound horse, ask a veterinarian, body work specialist or trainer to help you out.



Chapter 2

A Word about Horses

Horses are prey animals. They do not have a sound for pain and they fight through flight. Horses are continuous grazers and herbivores. They are capable of moving within minutes of birth. They do by design neither bite, nor attack. They are not born lazy, stubborn or hyper. Some are more sensitive than others. But in captivity they are all a product of their circumstances and management. Anyone who deals with horses has to take this into consideration.

Before we interact with a horse new to us, we do well to remember the above points and approach this flight animal calm

and thoughtful.

Some horses don't tie, some don't stand still. There are a multitude of reasons for that: Bad past experiences, pain, claustrophobia. Once you start working with a horse on his terms, you usually get just fine along with him. Get away from the pressure philosophy, it does not work. Dominance only seemingly works. Coming in with an attitude like "How can I help you? I am here to listen. Fear not, I won't hurt you. I have all the time in the world,," usually helps tremendously and the horses cooperate. I'll talk more about horse psychology later. But for now, we need to be able to pick up the hoof (hooves).

Standing close to the horse is safest. Pick up the hoof with just a light touch, even if the horse is a miniature. They deserve consideration as well. Some horses do not like to be touched on the leg much. Asking on the leg and then immediately just holding the hoof usually assures success. Hold the hoof by the toe as often as you can and move with the horse if he moves. Be clear in your communication with the horse.



Taking Pictures

This is a very important tool. Get a digital camera and learn to use it. Become familiar with all the different camera options, so you know how to take pictures close up, farer away and under different light conditions. The best light for hoof pictures is over-cast daylight. But you often have to take pictures in less than optimal circumstances.

You need to take between 25 and 27 pictures before the first trim. Make sure your card has enough memory (512 MB is great). I prefer a camera with a swivel body or a swivel LED screen. This allows you to take ground parallel pictures without having you head on the ground to look through the view finder. Most of these cameras also make short movement videos, which may be helpful for your documentation.

Before trimming the horse, make **one set of pictures** that you will label later: "before first trim".

Start with a full body shot from the left or right, it doesn't matter



which side. Just make sure you always take it from the same side. Always take a picture of the same side. Make sure the camera points to the middle of the body. For little

horses, you have to hold the camera lower. Try to have a quiet back-ground and avoid taking this picture against the light. This view will give you feedback about the stance of the horse.

When taking pictures of the hooves, make sure you always take your pictures in the same order: Left Front (LF), Right Front (RF), Left Hind (LH), Right Hind (RH). This allows you to sort the pictures later with ease into a template. By having the body shot first, you also know which horse the following hoof pictures belong to.

Take the following six different views of every hoof. Make sure the hooves and the ground are clean.

1.) Front View

Hoof should be weight bearing, the camera in line with the centerline of the hoof. Take the picture taken from ground level. This view allows you to evaluate the medio-lateral balance of the toe area



Make sure after "doctoring" your picture (also known as rotating and cropping) the bottom of the hoof is parallel to the bottom of the picture.

Now this is much easier to evaluate. If you decide to take your pictures a little more from above, or your camera lens is situated a little higher, that is fine as long as you are consistent.



2.) Lateral View

Hoof weight bearing, at right angle to the midline of the hoof and taken at the center of the hoof. Make sure that you really get the profile like this. It also helps to put a marker for the heel height in the picture.



This picture is taken too far from the front



And this one is taken too far from the back (you can see both heel bulbs).



Left: This picture is taken a little more from above. This is also before cropping and rotating. You can see how difficult it is to evaluate.



You have to experiment a little with your camera before you get a real lateral (full profile) picture that is easy to evaluate .



Here you have the same hoof, just taken more from above. Can you see how this changes the angles? If you always take your pictures like this one, it will still allow you to see if you are making progress. But you have to be consistent.



This picture is taken too far from above and too far from the front. An evaluation becomes impossible.



3.) Heel View (weight bearing)



Position the lens of the camera directly behind the hoof and in line with the bulbs.

You may want to have the opposite hoof picked up to avoid being accidentally kicked while taking the picture.



This picture is taken not quite central to the back of the hoof.



Here we have the same problem like in the picture above and the focus is also slightly off.

Here the horse is not weighing his heels.



4.) Sole View

Aim the camera lens at the center of the hoof like here on the right. It is helpful if the bulbs are relatively parallel to the top of the picture.



The picture is taken too far from the heel area



The picture is taken too much from the side





**5.) Side view
(non-weight bearing)**

Lifted hoof, camera at right angles to the midline of the hoof, with a little bit of sole showing. This is a real difficult view to photograph. It reveals scooping (or the lack thereof), and some insight about sole depth. How you hold the hoof (at which angle) really does not matter, as long as you are consistent again.



Here are a few more tips to make your pictures really credible and easy to read:



Make sure the hoof is clean.



This is much easier to evaluate.



6.) Heels
Camera pointing down onto the bulbs of the lifted hoof; toe pointing down. The heels have to be parallel with the bottom of the picture.



Here the heels are not parallel to the bottom of the picture and it becomes difficult to evaluate.



Careful with taking pictures against the light. Even if you lighten this picture, you will not be able to see very clear. The best pictures are made on over-cast days.



Beware of shadows, it often helps to produce a full shadow with your own body, blocking the sun out. This gets better results than these pictures.

These six views have to be taken every time.

Additional pictures you may want to take



From the front, camera level with the knees



and from the back, camera level with the hocks.



One other enhancement that has proven to be very useful is to take the picture against a solid background. Again, it is a little more work, but may enhance your pictures and the ability to evaluate details.

Why?

One seldom has a clear picture in his memory bank how a hoof looked before it was ever trimmed the first time. But that is not the only reason to take pictures. Taking pictures keeps you honest, makes you evaluate your skills and keep track of your progress. Over the years I have developed a way of producing pictorial case studies that allow comparative analysis of the hoof from before the first trim to the very last trim available. These case studies provide proof that what we do is working. Taking pictures in the right sequence, rotating and cropping them to provide an even result throughout the pictorial documentation is not easy, but can be learned by anyone, just like trimming.

Work in a meaningful way. You can download the case study template in the next chapter.