



Hydrating the Hoof

Thoughts on soaking
By Lynn Williams, NZ

The Statement:

"I believe the hoof takes in water at the water hole - but is dry the rest of a 24 -48 hour period, however long it takes the herd to get back to the water hole which in the wild is a 25 - 40 mile hike. And at the water hole the horses wade for 3-5 minutes - not long as this is where predators wait."



The Answer:

The feral horses of the US are a geographically specific population - in no way typical of all feral horses or of horses in general. What Jamie Jackson

observed during his time with them is valuable information but cannot be applied automatically to all horses. It's generally accepted that horses evolved on grasslands; some have adapted to rocky desert terrain but not all horses have feet which can adapt fully to arid conditions. The bigger a hoof, the more softer connective horn there is between the horn tubules and the less capable it is of adapting to a dry environment. Those that couldn't adapt to a dry, hard and abrasive environment, died.

As to time at water holes - my horses sometimes put themselves in the foot bath; if there's a flooded area in the fields they'll stand in it; when they go to the river they love to stand in the current for ages before trying to soak me by thrashing the water with their feet; they are totally relaxed and calm and one even likes to get down in shallow water and wallow (with a rider on if he can get away with it).

It was a common practice in the past to soak the feet of draught animals by walking them into streams to prevent cracking and ease inflammation.

Smaller denser feet need high impact and lots of movement - without it they'll contract - that amount of high impact mileage means increased circulation. Such a hoof is not as dependent on external moisture.

But a broader softer hoof is not as resistant to either impact or abrasion and is better suited to terrain in which it is also likely to be exposed to more moisture from the environment. Ever walked across a dewy meadow? There's nothing that hydrates a hoof better than a few hours on wet grass.

