

June 2015

Vol. 13, No. 1

# Horse of the Americas



## Good-bye to *Della* *Norush*, HOA Treasurer

On May 18,  
2015 HOA lost one  
of its treasures when



Della Norush succumbed after a long illness with serious complications that led to her death. President Thomas Norush was sadly forced to return her to the hospital once again on May 8, their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, where she died only a few days later. She was 72 years old. Tom and Della have 2 boys, Thomas and Douglas, 5 grandsons plus one granddaughter and one great grandson.

Della was HOA's only treasurer since our incorporation, serving us all for 15 years. She handled our finances with expertise and prudence while guiding us to fulfill our mission to our horses and still keep the registry solvent. She was dedicated to Colonial Spanish Horses and spent years and many long miles visiting the people who were preserving them all across the US. She and Tom travelled extensively and collected friends and knowledge pursuing breeders and enthusiasts from Wyoming to the Outer Banks. They met many of the folks whose names have become synonymous with Spanish Mustangs and saw many of the horses that became the foundation of the breed today. Thomas and Douglas often helped with the horses as boys. Douglas remains a strong supporter and gifted horseman who promotes our breed professionally in Missouri with his wife Dawn and their boys. Doug's wife Dawn will take over Della's duties as HOA Treasurer.

In 1972 Tom and Della went to Arizona to get two 2 year old colts from breeder Pete Hanson. Those colts were duly named Night Walker and Storm Cloud. Della claimed Night Walker, a black with a white face and four stocking legs whose color gave him his name as legend says a horse with such color could see better at night. The gelding loved her and though injury had claimed one of his eyes, he was a good ride and stood stock still for Della to mount. Della was 30+ years old before she

ever sat on a horse.

Most of her riding was done in Arizona in the Gallalaru Mountains with Tom on his horse and the boys on ponies. Once several riders joined them for a trail ride in the mountains. The trail forked at deep ravine and Della and Night Walker ended up on the wrong side of the trail with the other riders across the deep ditch. Night Walker realized their error and leaped to the other side to rejoin the trail ride with Della gamely hanging on. Tom's fear that she would lose her seat changed to a big smile as the pair landed safely on the other side and they continued the ride. He still remembers Della's adventure. A very few years later, a work related injury grounded Della forever because of equilibrium problems, but her heart remained with her family and their devotion to our horses. She gave Night Walker to Doug and the gelding stayed with the family until his death at 23.

She continued to visit CS Horse folks with Tom for the rest of her life, meeting Gilbert Jones, the Brislawns, Harold Smitty, Kim Kingsley and lots of others. They toured Shackleford and Currituck with longtime Banker breeder Dale Burris. They attended the SMR meeting in Mississippi at the Huffman's farm where they met Vickie Ives who would become Tom's partner in bringing back the Horse of the Americas Registry years later.

"We traveled all over wherever we could see the horses and talk to people about them," Tom said. "Della loved the foals most of all and enjoyed the wonderful exotic colors of the breed. When Doug started training, his mom was his strong supporter and spent many happy and prideful hours watching him (and later he and his sons) training. She had great confidence in their riding and their ability to get the best out of a horse."

Her personal ethic was strong; she always felt that a woman should be a lady and a man, a gentleman. She loved to help people.

"We had a habit of gathering up people who needed help," Tom remembers. "Once Della took a 19 year old country girl under her wing and even bought her a first dress for a special event."

Once taken into the Norush's heart, events rarely changed their devotion to their friends. A wonderful example of this is HOA member Deanne Creviston who was a good friend of their son Thomas's first wife. When she met Tom and Della, they became fast friends. Even though the marriage to Tom's oldest son did not last, Deanne's friendship with the Norush family did. They have been friends for thirty years. She drove from Tennessee to attend Della's funeral.

Thank you for so many years of love and support for America's First Horse, dear Della, and for your love of the people who preserve them! Here's hoping you are happily astride Night Walker across that Rainbow Bridge, riding freely once again with all the joy you once felt in the saddle. We all hope to share that eternal trail with you one day when we reach the other side.

## Grumblings from the Grumpy Old Man

by HOA President Tom Norush

A little while back, my grandson Douglas posted on Facebook a couple pictures of our 3 year old filly that he was playing with. He had done the usual ground work and had saddled her, stepped up and sat on her for a couple minutes. Our neighbor, Colin, was over watching. He is 7 years old, and has been coming over to visit and help for the past year or so. Douglas put him in the saddle and let them go around the round pen some. The filly has a wonderful stride, probably be gaited. And Colin stayed on. Sorry folks, no helmet. Yes, they are important and we should use one but?? He had no boots either, but his feet weren't in the stirrups.

Then we started getting emails, messages etc. about how could we put a child on a untrained horse. Wow. My usual first answer is that the kids bounce better than I do. I know, a smart a\*\* answer, but

what else do you expect from me? The concern is warranted, especially if you are working with the modern horses. But not with ours.

All of our horses have an affinity for people and especially for the children. There are a couple of different reasons for this. A number of years ago Dr. Deb Bennett wrote about the Spanish horse and their affinity for people. I am not sure if I agree with her completely. But 'way back in history, it was decreed that all of noble birth would ride whole horses, stallions and mares. Gelding were for the peasants. Then as now, all people were not equal as horse people. Some were better than others with the horses. The breed had to quickly evolve to be a people friendly breed. My theory, only.

Couple of examples: in 1972 we were living in AZ. Douglas, our youngest son, was in diapers. We went to see Pete Hansen and his horses. Pete had some great horses but didn't handle them. They were as wild as any off the range. I went out to see the horses a little closer, carrying Doug. I squatted down on one knee and was holding Doug on my other knee. Mo-Na-Se-Tah, a black and white paint mare, started edging over to me. She worked her way up and stuck her nose into Doug's belly, snorting and blowing on him. He was laughing and squealing, and reached out, grabbing her by her hair or cheeks, whatever his fingers could catch. She didn't care at all. They were having so much fun but my legs were giving out so I moved. Off she went. But as soon as I squatted back down, she was right back to play. She had never had a hand put on her before. I bought a son and grandson of hers from Pete.

A number of years later, Della and I were at the Cayuse Ranch, following one of the SMR's Annual meetings. As usual there were a lot of visitors there. We were standing at the large pen where Emmett had brought up a bunch of the broodmares. While we were standing there talking horse (really listening to Emmett talk about the horses), a 4 year old girl slipped away from her mother and crawled through the fence in with the mares. When her mother saw her in the middle of all the "wild" mares, she panicked. Emmett said just settle down, the old girls will take care of her. It didn't take the girls very long to figure out they had a visitor in their midst. The old mares started gently pushing the girl with their noses over to the gate. It didn't take very long for her to be picked up and given back to Mom.

There are some strains that are not as friendly as others. But they are the ones that become one person horses if you are the right person for them. Going back to Dr. Deb Bennett's article, she theorized that you could tell how much Spanish you had in your horses by their affinity to people. Being a prey animal, the horses are always looking for a predator that wants to eat them. Their eyes work a little different than ours. To a horse, a normal sized adult looks like a giant. Think of the courage it takes that horse to stand there the first time it is approached by us. But a child is just the right size in the horse's view.

## **THE HORSE OF THE AMERICA'S REGISTRY ANNUAL TREASURERS REPORT YEAR 2014**

BALANCE START OF YEAR	:	\$	840.06
DEPOSITS TO ACCOUNT	:		1,567.28
EXPENSES	:		( 1,819.02)
BALANCE AS OF 12-31-14	:	\$	588.32

### LIST OF EXPENSES

REGISTRY- supplies, postage, computer for 1 year	:	450.18
POSTAGE	:	76.68
AWARDS	:	170.46

INSPECTION DECLINED	:	30.00
ANNUAL MEETING	:	751.10
TREASUERS EXPENSE	:	129.56
SECRETARY EXPENSE	:	211.04
TOTAL EXPENSES	:	( 1,819.02)

Submitted by:  
 Della Norush,  
 Treasurer H.O.A. Registry

**Lido's Fund** is now in this checking account.  
 Balance is \$570.00.

## A MARVELOUS MUSTANG:

TALES FROM THE LIFE  
 OF A SPANISH HORSE



JANICE LADENDORF

### **A MARVELOUS MUSTANG** **Tales from the Life of a Spanish Horse** As Told To Janice M. Ladendorf 2nd edition, published 2015

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predators, he lets the reader know how a prey animal thinks about us and what he feels about everything that we do with him.

For over fifty years, the author has trained her own horses. She is the author of the book, *Practical Dressage for Amateur Trainers*, and many articles about using humane training methods to build a partnership with your horse. *A Marvelous Mustang* is based on her training diary, as well as her interpretation of her mustang's behavior, body language, and personality. She has been a librarian and lives in St. Paul, MN.



**Note from HOA newsletter editor:**

**Janice M. Ladendorf** has been kind enough to share with HOA some of her research about Frank Hopkins and the continuing debate over the authenticity of his famous race. I was intrigued and delighted to have Janice's research, and I'll bet other CS breeders will enjoy having it available too. Thanks. Janice!

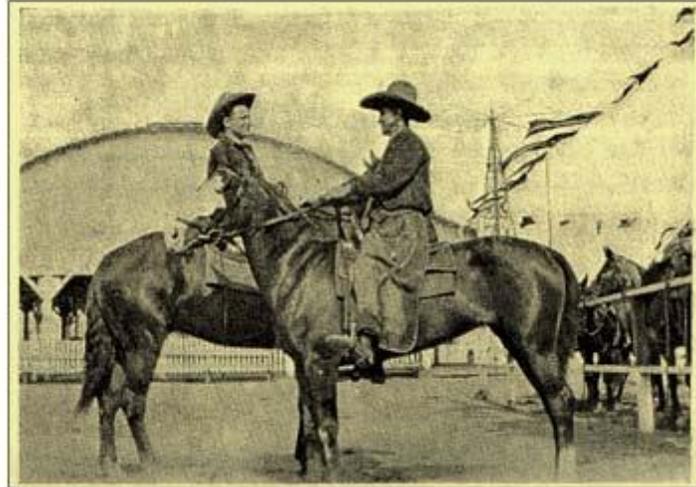
**Hidalgo and Other Stories by Frank T. Hopkins: The complete works of Frank Hopkins, with a comprehensive study by an international team of experts Basha and CuChlaine O'Reilly, editors The Long Riders' Guild Press, 2nd edition, 2003**

**Review by Janice M. Ladendorf, 2-5-15, Revised 4-15-15**

A vicious controversy raged around the 2004 movie, *Hidalgo*. Its plot is a simple one. An American cowboy, Frank Hopkins, goes to Arabia in 1890 and competes there in a 3,000 mile race. His mustang, *Hidalgo*, wins the race. The movie is based on these disputed facts, but the actual story is not a documentary. It is best classified as historical fiction. The Arabian horse has done well in modern endurance events and those who love this breed still don't want to believe that any mustang could defeat the finest Arabians in their own country. Arab leaders also disliked the movie because they felt some of the scenes portrayed their people negatively.

When the Long Riders' Guild took up the Arabian cause, they published *Hidalgo* after the movie had been produced, but before Disney released it. The editors state that their book contains all of the complete works of Frank T. Hopkins, published in their entirety for the first time in history, but unpublished material still exists in the archives of the University of Wyoming. Furthermore, not all the material in the book is by Frank Hopkins. There are several articles by other authors and the editors added information in text boxes, as well as many critical footnotes. In their introduction, "**A Trail of Deceit**", they expose what they call the Hopkins hoax or *Hidalgo-gate*.

They claim Frank Hopkins was an old West fraud, who had never been west of the Mississippi, and an equestrian fraud, who had never been on a horse in his life. In the photograph below, Frank has just won an endurance race. In the foreground, he is sitting on *Gypsy Boy* and shaking hands with Bud Tobel. It first appeared in an article published in *the Horse*, March-April, 1935.



Early in 2014, a friend asked me to check out *Hidalgo*. Since I was already familiar with some of the authors mentioned in the Introduction, I immediately questioned what the editors said about them and began checking their documentation. It is all too often incomplete, inaccurate, or misleading. Examples are given below. Other than the author's reputation, the validity of an historical work depends on accurate and complete documentation.

1) *Hidalgo* contains two long undated, unpublished manuscripts. They contain most of the information the editors used as a basis for their hoax theories. Presumably they found these manuscripts at the University of Wyoming, but they do not explain that the documents they found there were all in the handwriting of Frank's wife, Gertrude. She came from New York and probably had never visited the West nor been on a horse. As compared to what Frank actually said, we do not know how much material she may have added or changed.

2) *Hidalgo* contains fourteen published articles by Frank Hopkins and two others. Of these two, one is by Gertrude Hopkins and one by Colonel Parker. These articles were published in the 1940's by the Vermont Horse and Bridle Trail Bulletin. The editors did not use the correct title for the magazine and only dates were given on the manuscripts. Scholars use complete and accurate citations so others may find and check their source material. Fortunately, the Vermont Historical Society has this magazine for the relevant time period and kindly sent me copies of all sixteen articles so I could compare them to what was in *Hidalgo*.

When I compared the published articles to what was in the book, only five matched exactly. Eight were missing material, such as photographs or informative editorial notes. One left off information that clarified the authorship. Two were incomplete. One cut off before the last three paragraphs. The other one cut off in the middle of a paragraph and is missing the last two pages of the article. Although the editors had copies of the published articles, they did not correct the citations or compare what they published to the actual articles.

3) The editors failed to consult their own book to determine how many endurance races Frank claimed he had won on mustangs. In his letters to Mr. Harris and in *Hidalgo* (p. 124), Frank said he had won 402 endurance races. The back cover of *Hidalgo* states he claimed to have won 500 races. On page 90, the editors drop their number to 452. An article in the Arab News, 5-3-2003, lists 444 races. When I went through *Hidalgo*

and counted the number of races that were mentioned by Frank, I found exactly 402 races, many of which were informal competitions.

4) Their listing of their international team of experts includes librarians and other people who may have just given them information and are not quoted in their book.

The credentials of some of their "experts" were misstated.

a) James Davidson is the curator of the local museum in Rutland, Vermont. He went to the Vermont Historical Society where he found, copied, and mailed copies of the sixteen articles to the editors. He is not associated with the Vermont Historical Society.

b) Ghalib Al-Quaiti is not the Sultan of Yemen. He was born in London, educated in England, and ruled the Quaiti state for one year. It is one small state in southeastern Yemen and the race may have gone through it. The former Sultan now resides in Saudi Arabia.

5) Ann Hyland is an acknowledged expert on endurance riding. The editors cite her book, *The Endurance Horse - a World Survey of Endurance Riding from Ancient Civilizations to the Modern Competitions*, in their bibliography. Since she does not mention either the race in Arabia or the one from Texas to Vermont, the editors claimed this negative evidence proves the races never happened. What they failed to note is her book contains **NO** information on any of the 19th century races, some of which are well documented.

6) In their bibliography, the editors include books which contained no information on endurance racing and/or Frank Hopkins. One example is *The Horse in America* by Robert West Howard. They may be trying to imply these authors had not fallen for the Hopkins hoax.

7) One of Frank's friends was King Stanley. To attack what Frank or Gertrude had said about him, the editors used a text box to publish misleading information about him from his obituary. The obituary was published in the New York Times on May 14, 1927, not June of 1929 as the bibliography states. The editors obviously failed to check the accuracy of the information in this obituary. King Stanley was not listed as US Marshall in North Dakota, he could not have fought his way out of an ambush at the battle of Wounded Knee, and he is not mentioned in the 5th McGuffey Reader. The editors also cite another obituary supposedly published by the Montana News Association, but they are not a newspaper and maintain no archives for any of their members.

8) At times, the editors quote documentation, but without giving the reader a citation or listing it in their bibliography. The two long unpublished manuscripts and the letters they mention in their Introduction are one example. If their source was the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming, it should have been stated along with identification of the specific collection and location within this collection.

As problems with the documentation in Hidalgo continued to emerge, the less plausible became the editors' hoax theory. Historians are supposed to gather and validate their facts before they develop their theories. In *Hidalgo*, the editors appear to have been looking for experts and information to support their theory. Also, the background research they did appears to have been superficial. For example, they apparently were unaware of the fact that Buffalo Bill's Wild West went bankrupt in 1913.

The publication date of *Hidalgo* suggests the editors may have wanted to destroy the credibility of Frank Hopkins before the movie was released. In my opinion, this book is a brilliant piece of propaganda. While it may have fooled many people, it does not begin to meet the standards scholars normally use to establish the validity of their theories.

Frank Hopkins stated he was born at Fort Laramie in 1865, worked for Buffalo Bill's Wild West, won 402 endurance races, and married Gertrude Nehler in 1929. No one had any reason to question this information until the movie, *Hidalgo*, was produced. Disney never claimed this movie was a documentary. It is a story. In my opinion, it is an excellent piece of historical fiction. Such fiction may legitimately be based on real people and/or events.

In my opinion, two of the Long Riders created this hoax and looked for information to support it. They are Basha and CuChullaine O'Reilly (the editors). They edited the book, *Hidalgo*, and their Guild published it. Based on my analysis what they said in this book and on their website, I identified the beliefs summarized below.

1) The famous imposter Grey Owl published his book in 1931. Like Frank, he supposedly was born at Fort Laramie, his father was a scout and married to an Indian woman, and he worked for Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Since he spoke for the Canadian beaver, as Frank did for the American Mustang, the editors believe Frank used him as role model when he created his fictional history.<sup>1</sup>

Analysis: They have no evidence for their belief. Instead, could Grey Owl have imitated Frank? Does their belief imply anyone who dares to admire mustang qualities is a fraud or a liar?

2) They believe the historical and geographical errors in his manuscripts indicate Frank had never been west of the Mississippi. They describe him as "the biggest Old West fraud of all time."<sup>2</sup>

Analysis: The editors have proved the documents they published in *Hidalgo* contain some fictional material. Almost all of the errors in western history and geography occur in the unpublished manuscripts. The writing styles used in them suggest two people were involved, one of whom knew almost nothing about the West. Was this person Frank or Gertrude?

3) They found no documented photographs of him on one of the mustangs he claimed to have bred or on any horse so they believe his stories about his life in the saddle had to be lies. They describe him as the "greatest equestrian hoax ... of all time".<sup>3</sup> Analysis: They continue to reject the verification of the two photographs that do exist.



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# Crooked Fence Acres

Tom Norush and family

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Above: **Doug Norush visits Tom and takes Dancin' Fire for a spin for the first time in quite awhile—BRIDLELESS! Superior conformation and temperament is a Dancin' Fire specialty.**

## FOR SALE from Crooked Fence Acres:

**Dancin Wind** HOA #1898. Red Dun Gelding, foaled 5-2-2009  
Well started by Douglas Norush II, needs a experienced rider  
but can and will move.



**Angel of Fire**, HOA #1958.  
Foaled 5-2-2012. Pretty  
strawberry roan filly. Well  
started by Douglas II, gaited.  
Indian shuffle, likes to travel  
down the road.

**Dancin Bird**, HOA #1996,  
bright sorrel filly, ground  
work only so far, looks like  
Dancin' Hawk, her grandsire.



Call for more info on any of these.

**Frank Hopkins**  
**The 3000 Mile Race around the Arabian Peninsula**  
**Feasibility Study**  
**Research Report # 2**  
**10-17-14**

**Arabia**

Today Arabia means Saudi Arabia to most people, but there are five geographic regions within the general area of Arabia. These regions are described below.

1) The lands along the Mediterranean Sea. They include the modern country of Syria.

In 1890, all these lands were part of the Ottoman Province of Syria, as were parts of the modern countries of Turkey and Iraq.

2) The Hejaz. The coastal lands that lie along most of the Red Sea. Includes Mecca and Medina.

In 1890, controlled by the Ottoman empire. Now part of Saudi Arabia.

3) The Nejd. The central plateau of Arabia. Lies between the Hejaz on the west and the Al-Dahna desert on the east.

In 1890, under the nominal control of the Ottoman Empire. Now part of Saudi Arabia.

4) Al-Rab Al-Khali desert (The Empty Quarter)

Nomadic tribes roam the Nejd and the Al-Rab Al-Khali desert. They may pasture their stock in the Nejd in the summer and the desert in the winter. Nomads tend to pay little attention to political boundaries. Most of this desert is now part of Saudi Arabia.

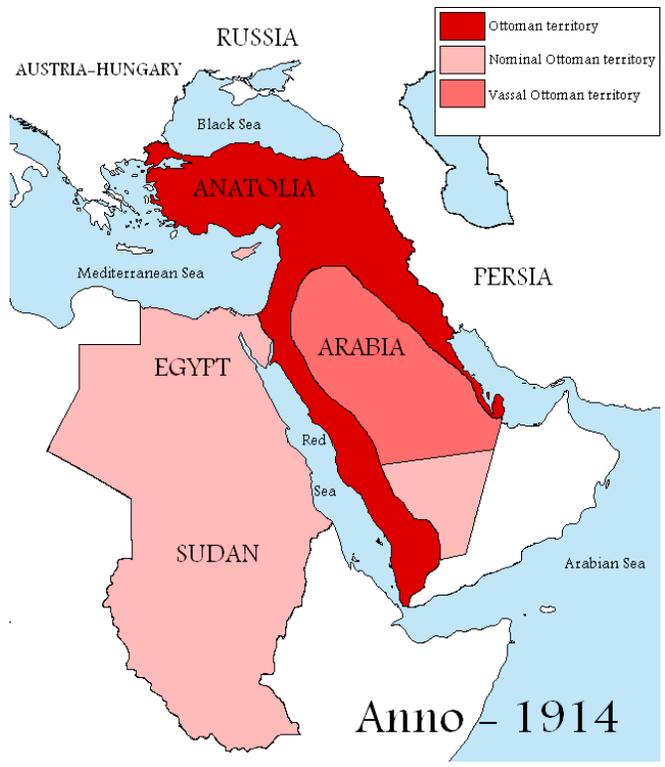
5) Southern Arabia (the modern countries of Yemen, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates).

In 1890, North Yemen was under the control of the Ottoman Empire, but most of South Yemen had become an British Protectorate. They took control of Aden in 1839. When the Suez Canal opened in 1869; the British needed an even firmer grip on Southern Arabia to protect their shipping as it moved up the Red Sea.

At that time, Oman included the United Arab Emirates. Oman kept its independence, but had long standing treaty relationships with the British.

Note: The Ottoman empire never controlled all of Arabia. From time to time, the extent of their control over the east and west coasts varied, but they never ruled South Yemen or Oman. At various time, they did have alliances with the tribes who lived in what is now Saudi Arabia.

There are two maps on the next page. The first one shows the Ottoman Empire in 1914 and the second one shows the Middle East in 2003.



Courtesy of Mapsof.net



Courtesy of Wikipedia

**Dr. Awed Al-Bade, Director of Research, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies**

There is absolutely no record or reference to Hopkins with or without his mustangs ever having set foot on Arabian soil. The idea of a historic long distance Arab horse race is pure nonsense and flies against all reason. Such an event in Arabia any time in the past is impossible simply from a technical, logistical, cultural and geopolitical point of view. This race has never been part of our rich traditions and equestrian heritage."<sup>1</sup>

Question: Does this statement apply just to the modern country of Saudi Arabia? or to all of the regions described above? or to all areas controlled by the Ottomans in 1890? or to all countries who have embraced the Muslim religion?

**What did Frank Hopkins actually say?**

Letter to Mr. Harris, March 9, 1940

"The long ride started from Aden (this was in 1890); we rode along the Gulf to Syria, then inland along the borders of the two countries. Much of this ride was over limestone country, the only feed available were plants called vatches [vetches] and to my surprise these vatches were very nourishing food for our horses if they were dry—some of the riders fed the vatches green. The only grain was barley. Over 100 horses started in that ride; many were ruled out the first week. My Hidalgo began passing other horses on the fourteenth day of the ride and gradually moved up toward the front every day. Hidalgo reached the finish stone thirty-three hours of actual travel ahead of the second horse. I was sixty-eight days in all on that ride of over 3,000 miles; there were a few days that we rested. Some of the way was over loose sand and the air was very dry and hot and water scarce. My horse lost quite a lot of flesh, still he finished strong and in good spirit."<sup>2</sup>

"The long ride started from Aden: a hundred of the finest desert horses and many from the limestone sections entered the race, the most perfect group of horses I ever expect to see - those from the desert were gray or white, those from the high land chestnut, some sorrel and a few black. The route led along the Gulf of Aden where the air was not too dry for our mounts; then the trail went along the seashore to Syria. We then turned from the sea and rode up the border between Syria and Arabia; part of the way was limestone and the rest flaming fine desert sand. Water was scarce, the air dry and hot. The Arabian horses could get along without water pretty well, but my Mustang began to gain ground once he got into the desert although he got water only once a day. At times there was no water for almost two days, still my 'Hidalgo' went on and at no time did he appear weakening although he grew gaunt and lost flesh. There were days of sand storms and then it was impossible to go on. Horse and rider rested between the camels that carried our feed. When a rider got out in the lead, two camels were sent ahead with him and these camels were changed three times on the ride. Many horses dropped out; when we entered the desert only five finished."<sup>3</sup>

The issues created by Dr. Al-Dade will be addressed separately.

**Geography - General**

As the map on the next page shows, the Arabian Peninsula has three real deserts, Al-Nufud, Al-Dahna, and Al-Rab Al-Khali. The steppe land is fit only for marginal grazing. Even if the land is fertile, agriculture depends on the availability of water.

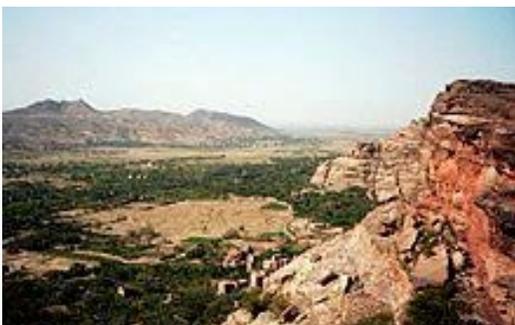


## Geography - Yemen

The coastal mountains that face the Red Sea separate North Yemen from the desert. Water washes down from the mountains to the valleys and plateaus below. This area enjoys a 20 to 30 inch annual rainfall and is heavily cultivated. Beginning in classical times, many fine Arabian horses have been raised there. In his second quote, Frank describes the chestnut, sorrel, and black horses that presumably came from the plateau of this high land.

In 1894, an English visitor to South Yemen described the coast as dreary and barren, but frequently cut by fertile canyon complexes (see map on prior page). Such a complex has a main canyon with one or more branches. In Yemen, some of the canyons are dry, but most of them have streams and a few had hot springs. Water can be scarce between canyons. Drifting sand and drought can create problems for agriculture, but in one good year enough food can be raised for five years. His exploring party had no problem finding horses and commented on the beautiful Arabs owned by some of the sheiks.<sup>4</sup>

The photos below are all of South Yemen. The first one shows the old town of Aden set into the coastal mountains. The second one shows a typical landscape in South Yemen. What the English visitor called a canyon is known in Arabia as a wadi. The third photo shows Wadi Dhar and the fourth photo shows terraced agriculture. All photos courtesy of Wikipedia.



When the riders left Aden, they could have headed northwest and cut across wadis or they could have followed the coast to Oman. If the coastal route was used, then provision ships could have accompanied the riders through Yemen and as they went on through Oman.

### **Geography - Oman**

Since classical times, Arabian horses have been raised in Oman. Many have been shipped from there eastern markets. Recently, population growth had required that the more land be used for growing crops and the export of horses is no longer allowed.

Dohfar is the western most province of Oman. It receives 25 inches of rain per year and considered the garden spot of South Arabia. An English visitor actually found two lakes there.<sup>5</sup> Dohfar is still producing frankincense and shipping it to India. Frankincense is an aromatic resin produced by special trees. The coastal land beyond Dohfar is gravelly plain until it reaches the Wahiba Sands. This strip of desert is 50 miles wide and 100 miles long. It ends just before the Hajar Mountains. The first photograph below is of Dohfar, the second one is of an oasis in the desert. Photographs courtesy of Wikipedia.



When the ride reached the desert, there are two possible routes. One goes north and east to go around the sands and the other one goes east along the sandy beaches. If the race followed the beaches, then both food and water could have been provided by support ships.

In northeast Oman, there are two fertile stretches of land divided by the Hajar mountains. Since Frank Hopkins states the race did not cross any mountain ranges, it could not have gone east through the passes to reach the fertile plain that extends to the sea. It had to have followed the Dahira plain that runs west of the mountains. On this plain, water channels called Aflaj bring water down from the hills. The photographs below show one of these channels and the growth water brings to the otherwise barren land. Photographs courtesy of World Heritage Site.



By following the Dahira plain, the ride would probably have passed just south of the modern United Arab Emirates. In 1890, this area was still part of Oman.

### **Geography - Persian Gulf**

When the riders reached the Persian Gulf, they followed the sea. In 1904, an American traveler described this coast as a dry, barren plain. Touches of green only occurred around the rare towns. The ground was gravely hard pan. He comments, "Since there are no trees and hence no wood on the shores of the Persian Gulf, the boats are made of the mid ribs of the leaves of the date palm. Such a boat is really a raft, it being impossible to keep out the water."<sup>6</sup> He took the photograph below. It shows the gravely ground quite plainly.



On this desolate coast, both water and feed probably would have been scarce. Again, ships could have been used to provide the riders with water and food for themselves and their horses. With the discovery of oil, this area has radically changed. It is now full of cities, oil piping, and oil drilling sites.

### **Geography - Syrian Desert**

When the riders reached the end of the Gulf, the ride continued on the border between the Province of Syria and what would become Saudi Arabia. At that time, this border may have been farther east than the modern one. This may have allowed the riders to stay closer to the edge of the Syrian desert where they could find more water and possibly some grazing. Special hazards, such as salt flats or lava ridges, lie in the middle of this desert.

Although the Syrian desert has been defined as steppe land, crossing it may have been the toughest part of the ride. As Frank describes, it is a mixture of fine sand and limestone (hard pan). The Syrian Bedouin are nomadic tribes who roam in this area to find pasture for their herds. The grey or white desert horses that Frank mentions in his second quotation probably belong to these nomads.

Frank comments these horses got along pretty well without water. From his travels with the Syrian Bedouin, T. A. Dodge believes their Arabs have been specially bred and conditioned to endure long hours without food or water. He believes horses with rounder barrels will require more food and water to stay in condition than will the Syrian Arabs with their narrow frames.<sup>7</sup>

For the first time, provision ships could not be used to supply the riders and their horses. Only camels could have carried food and water for the riders and their horses. Fortunately, by that time many horses would have dropped out of the race. The photograph below is a view of this desert. Photograph courtesy of Wikipedia.



After crossing this desert, the end point of the race may well have been on the Mediterranean Sea near Aleppo. This is the city where the Syrian Bedouin usually go to sell their unwanted male horses.<sup>8</sup>

Frank does comment, "I will say of those people [the Arabs] they were fair in every way - no trickery amongst the judges nor the riders."<sup>9</sup>

Given some of the trickery that had occurred in American races, this is quite a compliment and a contrast to what was shown in the movie, *Hidalgo*.

#### **Dr. Awed Al-Bade's Statement**

His quoted opinion of the raises more than one issue. Interpretation of his statements will be affected by exactly how he is determining the definition of Arabia.

1) **"Such an event Arabia any time in the past is impossible simply from a technical, logistical, cultural and geopolitical point of view."**<sup>11</sup>

a) If Arabia is interpreted to mean modern Saudi Arabia, he is correct. As he initially said, a race that went through his country could not possibly have covered 3000 miles. In 1890, would his country even be able to produce 100 Arabs for such a race?

Historical Note: According to Bonnie Hendricks, author of *International Encyclopedia of Horse Breeds*, the Arab horse did not originate in Saudi Arabia. When horses had spread from western Asia to North Africa, the Bedouin still rode camels. Just before the rise of Mohammed, they had begun to breed horses on a very small scale, but their homeland (Hejaz or Nejd) could support few horses. When she was doing research for her book, a caller from Jeddah confirmed the Arab horse did not originate in Saudi Arabia and informed her that Saudi Arabia never had had that many good Arabian horses.<sup>10</sup>

When Ibn Saud rose to power in the 1930's, his men rode camels. After the discovery of oil produced enough revenue, they rode horses.<sup>11</sup>

(b) If Arabia is interpreted to mean all of the regions described above, then he is not correct. When I compared the words of Frank Hopkins to detailed information on Arabian geography, the route described above appears to be both geographically and logistically feasible. Since it followed the coast from Aden to the head of the Gulf of Persia, it did not touch the Hejaz, the Nejd, or the AL-Rab AL-Khali. Most of this route went through areas, such as Yemen, Oman, and Syria, where many horses had lived and worked for centuries.

c) In 1890, the route of this race passed through areas that were controlled by the British, the rulers of Oman, or the Ottoman Empires. At that time, the British and Ottoman Empires were not yet enemies. Visitors to their territories encountered no political problems in their travels; but as they traveled from one tribal territory to another, they usually had to pay a fee to each reigning sheik.<sup>4 and 8</sup>

Oman converted early to Mohammedanism, but developed their own set of beliefs. Ibdī Islam does not allow converts, but is accepting of strangers. Today Oman welcomes tourists to their fascinating country.

After World War I, the Ottoman Empire no longer existed. The political situation continued to change radically throughout the 20th century. Today, such a race would not be politically possible. Other than political unrest and border controls, the major barrier would be the development of the oil industry on the northeastern shore of the Persian Gulf.

d) As far as I know, every human culture with horses has engaged in some form of racing, but modern Saudi Arabia could be an exception. When Ibn Saud was firmly in control, his regime began an annual race of fifty miles for camels<sup>11</sup> If camel racing is acceptable, why is horse racing not acceptable?

If Arab culture is more broadly defined, then horse racing was common. For example, in the third century AD, "King Bahram [of Persia] owned 40,000 horses, constantly racing them to sift out the best mares and stallions for breeding"<sup>12</sup>

e) Does he define technical to mean the equipment and experience needed to ride long distance races? If so, there should have been no problem. Long distance rides and races have essentially the same technical requirements.

**2) "There is absolutely no record or reference to Hopkins with or without his mustangs ever having set foot on Arabian soil."<sup>1</sup>**

Dr. Awed Al-Bade is known for identifying and discovering manuscripts written by visitors to Arabia over many centuries, but the internet showed no publications under his name. In the case of Frank Hopkins, no written records existed until long after the race.

Access to modern Arabian countries may now be rigidly controlled, but in 1890 the Ottoman Empire had no such restrictions. What records existed that he could have checked?

**3) "The idea of a historic long distance Arab horse race is pure nonsense and flies against all reason. ...This race has never been part of our rich traditions and equestrian heritage."<sup>1</sup>**

Frank's letter to Mr. Harris did state that this race had been run for 1000 years, but this information came from Ras Rasmussen. The editors and their experts could find no record of any such historic race in Arabian literature, but it could well have been a unique event possibly managed by Ras Rasmussen. He controlled all of the camel freight out of Aden.

In the first edition of their book, there was an illegible spot that completed a statement by Rasmussen. I interpreted what he had said to mean that racing had begun 4000 years ago. Frank later repeats this information, but states this race had been run since the domestication of the horse in 2000 BC.<sup>13</sup> We now know that the horse had been domesticated by 6000 BC, but this belief reflects relatively recent archeological discoveries.

In the 2nd edition, this same statement by Rasmussen had been changed to state the race had been run for 1000 years. Why did they not catch and correct or attack the statement made by Frank<sup>13</sup>?

### **Elly Foote's statement (Equestrian Explorer and author of "Riding into the Wind")**

**"Hopkins' claim that one could run a horse into the noonday sun of Arabia for a couple of months straight, while feeding him weeds and only watering him every couple of days, should make the blood of any true horseman boil. The notion of a 3,000 mile race across the Arabian desert could only have been conceived by someone like Hopkins who had never been there."<sup>14</sup>**

What this statement reveals is Ms. Foote's ignorance of both Arabia and what Hopkins actually said. As has already been explained, there are only three true deserts in Arabia and the course described by Hopkins did not go through any of them.

Frank states that Hidalgo was fed barley and vetches. Barley is an excellent substitute for oats and normally fed with water. There are several species of vetches. They are not weeds, but make excellent hay. Both barley and vetches are fed widely in Europe and the Middle East, as well as in California.

At no time was Hidalgo deprived of water for two days. When they crossed the Syrian desert, Frank does state at times, there was no water for **almost** two days. In the wild, horses will graze three days away from water.

### **Note on Climate:**

In evaluating the feasibility of this race, climate is a crucial factor that has been ignored. In the winter, the climate is pleasant. In the summer, it is brutally hot. In winter, camels can go without water for 3 weeks, in the summer for 3 days. The World's Fair in Paris ended in Oct. of 1889. After it ended, Frank said he left for Arabia in the Harris letter. That date would have given him time to get to Aden and bring Hidalgo back into condition before the race. It would then have begun early in 1890 and been run during the winter months. Frank presumably had his winters free, but was committed to Bill's show for their whole season.

In Hidalgo, a different story appears.<sup>15</sup> It describes a spring date and a departure from the United States. This date would have conflicted with Frank's commitment to Bill's show and put the race in the hottest part of the year. This story may have been invented by Gertrude. She also could have been the one who identified Rasmussen as a Libyan. Hidalgo's illness, as described in this story, is unknown to medical science.

That illness as well as the horse stealing episode sound like more of her tall tales, as does the inclusion of Turks in the race.

**Ghalib Al-Quaiti (the last ruling Sultan of the Quaiti State in what is now Yemen)**

**"There is absolutely no record of any horse race in the past staged from Aden!"<sup>15</sup>**

Aden is in the far west of South Yemen. From 1839 to 1967, it was ruled by Great Britain. The Quaiti State was in the eastern part of South Yemen.

**Magdy Abdk Azia (In 2004, Vice President of the Egyptian Endurance Riders Association)**

**"It is against all tribal Arab tradition to hold long distance races. Historically the Arabs raced their horses for short distances, and when they were on the warpath they rode their camels with the horses in tow until they were near the site of battle then mounted them for a quick attack. At around the time of the alleged race the horse breeding tribes were suffering from severely diminishing numbers of horses due to the transfer of many of their best mounts to Egypt 30 years earlier, and a drought that affected the area for years."<sup>16</sup>**

A drought occurred in Egypt in 1835 and in 1888-92 in Ethiopia.

William R. Brown notes that a match race of 90 miles across the desert to Cairo occurred in the 1940's. The distance qualifies it as an endurance race.<sup>17</sup>

In "Riders of Algeria", T.A. Dodge reports on a ride of 930 miles that took 45 days.<sup>18</sup> In Riders of Many Lands, he comments on another ride where the Arabs averaged 80 miles a day.<sup>19</sup>

In his travels in Syria, T.A. Dodge found no lack of horses. In the Aleppo market, he found average male four year old Arabs sold for \$30-50 and fine ones for \$70-100. Exceptional Arabs were hard to find and prices were negotiable.<sup>8</sup>

Could her comments apply only to the Nejd?

**Dr. Mohammed Tala Al-Rasheed (Scholar in Arabic and English literature and history)**

No publications under this name showed up on the internet.

**"A Bedouin would move his family and animals hundreds of miles in search of pasture. But ride across Arabia to cross a finishing line? Inconceivable."<sup>20</sup>**

The race did not go across Arabia, but around the coasts. Again, could his comment have applied only to the Saudi Arabia?

Unfortunately, Frank does not tell us what he won for winning this race. Willingness to compete could easily depend on the amount of prize money. T.A. Dodge comments that a poor Syrian Bedouin might have just one mare and depend on selling her foals to support his family.<sup>8</sup> Tribal and regional rivalry over who owned the best horses might also have played a role.

Note: Beginning with 2005, there is now an annual endurance race held every year in Saudi Arabia.

### **Comment on Condition:**

In both quotations, Frank does comment on Hidalgo's loss of condition.

The Cavalry Manual of Horse Management has three statements that could help explain this problem.<sup>21</sup>

When horses are expected to march 35 miles a day, they will typically show "considerable loss in flesh after a week or ten days of marching."<sup>21</sup>

Depending on how fit Hidalgo was at the start of the race, he may have shown such loss of fat (flesh) as he gained condition.

"Pebble gravel is quite ideal [footing] under practically all conditions of weather."<sup>21</sup>

Much of the race traveled over such easy going. Hard pan is pebbly gravel (see photograph under Persian Gulf. Depending on the depth of the sand, such areas would have been tiring for the horses to travel through. Only camels have feet that are perfectly adapted to both hard pan and sand.

"Dry heat is far less damaging than moist heat. The former greatly increases the horses need for water."<sup>21</sup>

When Hidalgo experienced the dry heat of the Syrian desert, he may also lost weight from dehydration. What he had to endure there reflects the Bedouin attitude towards their horses.

William R. Brown quotes Lady Anne Blunt as stating Arabs often ride their mares for long distances, sometimes for as much as month. Their horses are badly fed and expected to go for days without water.<sup>17</sup>

On his rides with the Syrian Bedouins, A.T. Dodge comments on some rides, the horses were frequently fed and watered. On other rides, they were expected to go for long distances without food or water. If the banks of a stream are high, the Bedouin do not water their horses because they carry no form of bucket with them.<sup>22</sup> In this situation, a cowboy could use his hat to carry water to his horse.

### **Evaluation:**

Could an American mustang really have beaten the best Arabs on their own ground? From his service in the cavalry, Colonel T. A. Dodge knew mustang ponies well and he spent a lot of time with the Syrian Bedouin.

He comments, "I would stake my money on a hundred broncos of the Western plains, ridden in their own way by cowboys, against a hundred Arabians of the Syrian desert, ridden by Bedouins - for a pull of one to five hundred miles under conditions fair to each."<sup>23</sup>

After the Dark Ages, little was known in Europe about Arabia south of the Mediterranean coastal region. If little was known in Europe, even less was known in the United States. Not until 1875 did Central and South Arabia open up to European travelers or explorers. Even with the use of modern information resources, matching Frank's descriptions with Arabian geography was not an easy task. How could Frank Hopkins have known so much precise and accurate detail if he had not ridden around the coast and through the Syrian desert in the race?

## Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Hidalgo and Other Stories, The Long Riders Guild Press, 2nd edition, 2004, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>"Letter from Frank Hopkins", Harris, Albert W., The Blood of the Arab, Chicago, The Arabian Horse Club of America, 1941, p. 50-52.

<sup>3</sup>Hidalgo, p. 141.

<sup>4</sup>Bent, J. R., "Hadramut", Liv Age 103:81-94, Oct., 1994.

<sup>5</sup>J. Theodore Bent, "The Land of Frankincense and Myrrh", Living Age, v.207, issue 2679 Nov. 9, 1885, pp. 342-356.

<sup>6</sup>Fairchild, David G. "Travels in Arabia and Along the Persian Gulf", National Geographic Magazine, v. XV, no. 4, April, 1904, pp. 141-151.

<sup>7</sup>Dodge, T.A. Riders of Many Lands. NY, Harcourt, 1894, pp. 362, 366.

<sup>8</sup>Dodge, T.A. "Riders of Syria", Harper's Magazine, vol. 87, Oct. 1893, pp. 771-8).

<sup>9</sup>Hidalgo, p. 88.

<sup>10</sup>Hendricks, Bonnie. International Encyclopedia of Horse Breeds. University of Oklahoma, 1995, pp. 40-41.

<sup>11</sup>House of Saud, DVD, Martin E. Smith, 2005.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Phillip Fox. A Pictorial History of Performing Horses. Superior Pub. Co., 1960.

<sup>13</sup>Hidalgo, p. 141.

<sup>14</sup>Hidalgo, p. 129.

<sup>15</sup>Hidalgo, p. 87-8, 140-1.

<sup>16</sup>Hidalgo, 141.

<sup>17</sup>Brown, William R. The Horse of the Desert. NY, Macmillan, 1947, pp. 186-7.

<sup>18</sup>Dodge, T.A. "Riders of Algeria", Harper's Magazine, vol. 87, July 1893.

<sup>19</sup>Dodge, T.A. Riders of Many Lands. NY, Harcourt, 1894, pp. 124-5.

<sup>20</sup>Hidalgo, p. 141.

<sup>21</sup>Devereaux, Frederick L., editor. The Cavalry Manual of Horse Management. A.S. Barnes & Co, 1979, p. 144-5.

<sup>22</sup>Dodge, A.T. Riders of Many Lands. NY, Harcourt, 1894, p. 365.

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