

Issue Four

THE

2019

ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y



Official Publication of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress
Member Association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations)



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THE USIHC MISSION

- To promote the knowledge of the Icelandic horse within the United States and its correct use as a competition and riding horse.
- To keep a registry of purebred Icelandic horses in the United States.
- To facilitate communication among all USIHC members.
- To represent the United States in FEIF.

The U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress is a member of FEIF (www.feif.org), the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations, representing the national Icelandic horse associations of 21 countries. FEIF governs competition activities and regulates the breeding and registration of Icelandic horses throughout the world outside of Iceland.

The USIHC was formed in 1987 by representatives of the U.S. Icelandic Horse Federation and the International Icelandic Horse Association to meet the FEIF rule that only one association from each country is allowed to represent the breed.



Photo by Helmut Ziewers

WHY JOIN THE USIHC?

As the owner or rider of an Icelandic horse, you chose a very special breed with its own culture and history. It is important to learn about the breed's unique traits, capabilities, and needs, so that you and your Icelandic horse will have a happy relationship and it will live a healthy and long life. By joining the USIHC, you connect to a worldwide network of experts to help you care for, ride, train, breed, and learn more about your horse.

The USIHC is the umbrella organization for 15 affiliated clubs: 14 regional clubs and an activity club for breeders and professional trainers. Our Registry links to WorldFengur, the worldwide database of all registered Icelandic horses (USIHC members have free access to WorldFengur), and we publish *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*, maintaining an online archive of all issues since 2008.

The USIHC sponsors scientific research on the Icelandic horse, helps promote the Icelandic horse at expos and through social media, supports educational seminars and events like the American Youth Cup, organizes leisure activities like the Sea 2 Shining Sea virtual ride, creates teaching tools like the Riding Badge Program, and offers prac-

tical and monetary support to organizers of shows and clinics.

The Icelandic horse has international competition rules: You can compete in the same classes and receive comparable scores in any FEIF member country. Likewise, the Icelandic horse is one of few breeds with international evaluation standards, so that breeding horses from all over the world are judged on the same 10 points of conformation and 10 ridden abilities. The USIHC sanctions sport and breeding shows that conform to FEIF rules.

The USIHC is responsible for the U.S. teams at the FEIF Icelandic Horse World Championships, the FEIF Youth Cup, and the FEIF Youth Camp. Through FEIF, the USIHC votes on rules and policies that affect the welfare of the Icelandic horse worldwide.

As a member of the USIHC, your dues and registration fees make all this possible. Our board members and committee chairs are all volunteers. As a member-driven organization, the USIHC grows stronger the more active and involved our members become. Please join us so that the USIHC can, as FEIF's mission states, "bring people together in their passion for the Icelandic horse."



ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y

THE ICELANDIC HORSE QUARTERLY

Issue Four 2019

Official Publication of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress (USIHC), a member association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations).

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On the cover: Riding is a winter sport, too! Bundled up in snow suits, Kamilla Brickner (age 7) and Tristan Brickner (age 5) love riding and galloping in the soft snow with their lovely horses Drift, age 26 (CA1992200638) and Rún, age 23 (IS1995266600). They go out in any weather with their mom, Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir, who took this photo.

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USIHC NEWS

2019 EVALUATIONS

Kara L. Noble reports: In the fall, 15 Icelandic horses were assessed in two USIHC-sanctioned breed evaluations, 11 at the Cobleskill Fairgrounds in Cobleskill, NY on September 1-2, and four at Harmony Icelandics in Peru, IA on September 12-13.

In New York, Iceland's chief judge and breeding leader Þorvaldur Kristjánsson and Icelandic breeding judge Arnar Bjarki Sigurðarson evaluated five domestic-bred mares, three imported mares, two domestic geldings, and one imported gelding. Seven of the horses were evaluated for conformation only; four received full assessments for conformation and ridden ability. All of the horses scored first or second prize for conformation. The four horses that received full evaluations had also participated in the 2018 northeastern breed evaluation, and all showed improved scores this year.

The highest judged horse in the New York show was Zophonías from Vinland, who was bred and trained by his owner, Martina Gates, and shown by Helga Una Björnsdóttir. Zophonías received scores of 8.20 for conformation and 8.15 for ridden abilities. His total of 8.17 moves him into a tie for second-highest-judged domestic horse with the mare Osk from Helms Hill, also owned by Martina.

Two riders also presented horses for unofficial scores at the New York show. With this option, conformation scores are official and are entered into the international WorldFengur database. Ridden ability scores, however, remain private, which allows riders who are new to breed evaluations to develop their skills and gives



Carrie Brandt presents Mirra frá Kambi (US2010205339) for conformation judging at the Iowa breeding show.



Zophonías from Vinland (US2012104637) was the highest judged horse at the New York breeding show, with a total score of 8.17. Here he poses with judges Þorvaldur Kristjánsson and Arnar Bjarki Sigurðarson, his rider, Helga Una Björnsdóttir, and his owner and breeder, Martina Gates (kneeling).

young horses a chance to gain experience before being ridden for scores that will be entered into their permanent records. Richard Davis rode two of his horses, Framtið from Solheimar and Nátthrafn from Solheimar, for unofficial scores, as did trainer Jana Meyer, who showed the mares Æsa from Silver Maple and Nikólína from Vinland.

The New York Evaluation was organized by Martina Gates and and Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir with support from U.S. Breeding Leader Sherry Hoover. A cadre of volunteers, including Shannon Fitzgerald, Amy Goddard (who organized a fabulous catered lunch), Heleen Heyning, Jana Meyer, Ron and Sherry Hoover, Leah and Grace Greenberger, Cindy Dunne (who also designed the show program), Millie Angelina, and Kara Noble (who coordinated data entry and administrative details), helped ensure that the event ran smoothly. Thanks are also in order for Jessica Haynsworth, who was compelled to do a last-minute DNA test for her gelding, Bogi frá Efri-Rauðalæk, to comply with new FEIF requirements imposed by a rule change made just weeks before the show.

The Iowa Breed Evaluation was organized by Virginia Lauridsen at her farm, Harmony Icelandics, in conjunction with the Toppur Sport Horse Show. Sherry Hoover supervised data entry. Chief judge Elsa Albertsdóttir (Iceland) and international breeding judge Heimir Gunnars-

son (Sweden) evaluated four mares, two domestic bred and two imported from Iceland. All were judged first or second prize for conformation; three were judged second prize for ridden ability.

Baldursbrá from Winterhorse Park, bred by Barbara and Dan Riva, owned by Lori and Sharron Cretney, and shown by Terral Hill, was the highest judged horse at the Iowa show: Baldursbrá ranked first prize for conformation with a score of 8.06 and second prize for ridden ability with a score of 7.67; her total score was 7.83.

Two owners rode their own horses in the evaluation: Stephanie Surbey presented Rúna from Westerley and Virginia Lauridsen showed Koldimm frá Miðási.

The Iowa show also included a seminar, allowing participants to learn more about breeding-related resources. On Thursday, the judges lectured on breeding goals, then offered comments and insights to participants in a mock evaluation. On Friday, they explained the BLUP (Best Linear Unbiased Prediction) breeding algorithm and discussed how to use WorldFengur, the online Icelandic studbook.

Coordinating and running a breed evaluation is a time-consuming and expensive process, and Martina Gates said it was "a true miracle that this year's organizers were able pull together two breed shows with so few horses."

"I realized early on that we would have very few horses presented for evalu-

ation and organizing a breed evaluation would need to be a 'labor of love,' done for the experience and educational opportunities," said Virginia. "We have very few evaluations in the U.S. In Iceland, if a horse is not quite ready, it can likely be evaluated a few weeks later, but here you probably have to wait at least a year for another opportunity." Because they are rare, each U.S. breed evaluation is critical to the health and vitality of the Icelandic horse breed.

The organizers of both shows emphasized how grateful they were for the support of the USIHC, its affiliated regional clubs, and dedicated Icelandic horse enthusiasts from across the country as they prepared for and ran these two breed shows.

Martina and Sigrún particularly appreciate the financial and administrative help they received from the members of the Northeast Icelandic Horse Club (NEIHC) and everyone who donated through the GoFundMe campaign or purchased items in the online auction.

Virginia is similarly grateful to Harmony Icelandics trainer Guðmundur Skúla-son, U.S. Breed Leader Sherry Hoover, Deb Cook (for entering scores into Worldfengur), and Toppur Icelandic Horse Club members Cindy Niebuhr, Liz Appel, and Kirby Antisdell for their assistance.

The organizers of both shows also want to acknowledge the hard work of the trainers, owners and breeders who sent horses to the show. "We could not have pulled off these shows without them," said Martina. "The people who produce and train horses and then have them evaluat-

ed are crucial to keeping a healthy, vital Icelandic horse in the U.S."

For more details about breed evaluations, see "Bringing Back Breed Evaluations" in Issue Four 2018 of the *Quarterly*.

SEA 2 SHINING SEA

Janet Mulder reports: Sea 2 Shining Sea is a virtual trail ride organized by the USIHC Leisure Riding Committee. The current ride, following the Pony Express and Butterfield Overland Mail routes, will conclude at the end of December 2019. The riders keep an active Facebook page, where they share photos and stories of their experiences riding Icelandic horses in the U.S. Each month one is randomly chosen as "Rider of the Month."

June's Rider of the Month was Raven Flores of Wisconsin. Raven owns two Icelandics: Huginn frá Þorkelshóli (25 years old) and Rothadis from Tolthaven (18). Raven joined the virtual ride, she said, because "It's fun to be part of a cyber trail ride with other Icelandic horse owners." Her goals are to be healthy enough to keep riding into her senior years. "The best part of trail riding," she said, "is seeing the partnership that I have with my amazing horse, Rothadis. Rothadis is a phenomenal Breed Ambassador, she's out hitting the trails and showing other horse owners what a great breed we are blessed to ride."

The July Rider of the Month was Sandie Weaver of California. She owns three Icelandics: Aska frá Hófsstöðum, Birta frá Brúnastöðum, and Sara frá Rauðamel. "I became interested in Sea 2 Shining Sea after participating in FEIF's virtual rides to the World Championships

and Landsmot," she said. "I knew it would be a lot of fun. I enjoy trail riding because I forget what time it is, what day it is, what month it is... I just notice nature all around me. I thought the Pony Express theme was very clever and I recently checked out a book from the library about the history of the Pony Express." Her goals, she admitted, "are to simply get my horses and myself out and to keep moving. The total number of years of my horses and myself equal 138, so the phrase 'move it or lose it' definitely applies to us."

Asked about her life with Icelandics, Sandie explained, "In December 1999, our daughter's equestrian 4-H group went to Night of the Horses in Del Mar, CA. Afterward, we talked with the Icelandic horse importer and he invited us out for a trail ride. We started going every three weeks for the next six months. The next July we went on a riding trip to Iceland with him. We had no intention of buying any horses, and we came home with two.

"Over the past 19 years, we have ridden in parades, in USIHC shows, gone camping, ridden in clinics, ridden on the beach, and ridden on a wine-tasting tour. Our horses were used for a short time in a school for beginner riders. Aska was also used for charity causes. Anyone who donated \$25 (or more) to a children's cause—church youth group, school program, children's hospital, etc.—got a one-hour lesson on Aska. She earned over \$5,000 for children's causes.

"Our horses are 31, 26, and 24, and I don't know how much longer they will be with us, but I am super grateful to the USIHC for sponsoring such a fun program that we can still participate in."

The August Rider of the Month was Lisa McKeen of Washington. Lisa also owns three Icelandics: Salina from Evans Farm, Elsa from Extreme Farm, and Bjarki from Extreme Farm. "I love the Sea 2 Shining Sea program because it is a means to connect Icelandic horse owners and riders across the U.S. My goals are to keep healthy, happy horses and to spend time with them every day. Trail riding is a way to provide interest and variety to horses who are naturally curious and like to move forward. Trail riding is where great training happens, in novel settings so that the brains of both horses and riders don't go numb."

Lisa also gives lessons and provides Icelandics for people to try out. "We love



Lisa McKeen, the S2SS Rider of the Month for August, poses with Elsa, Sali, and Bjarki. Photo by Willa Herndon-Schepper.



Raven (Nancy) Flores was the S2SS Rider of the Month for June.

to do parades and exhibits,” she said. “Clinics are fun too. Elska drives, and the cart is a nice change from riding. I generally pony one horse when I go out, so some of the trail work is without a rider. Finally, I’m learning about Intrinzen and liking the relationship building it provides, as well as the physical benefits for the horses’ bodies and mine.”

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

The USIHC Board of Directors will welcome three new members in January 2020: Virginia Lauridsen, Martin Nielsen, and Lucy Nold. The Election Committee received three nominations by the October 1 deadline and, since three spots were open, no election was called. Each new board member will serve a three-year term. Below are their bios:

Virginia Croskery Lauridsen is the owner of Harmony Icelandics, LLC in Truro, IA; she has been involved with Icelandic horses since 2013, when she imported four from Iceland. Harmony Icelandics now boasts a FEIF-sanctioned oval track and breeding track and has hosted shows, evaluations, and clinics. Virginia has become very active in the breeding, training, and sales of Icelandic horses. She has completed the first three levels of the Knapamerki

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS 2019 *By Jenny Melville, U.S. Team Member*

We arrived in Berlin on August 1. After the first vet check at the entrance, we were allowed to move our horses into the stables. Friday was the only day for free training: We were able to ride on both the training and competition tracks to get the horses used to the grandstands, VIP tent, judging tents and so on.

Saturday through Monday we had scheduled training time with Team Canada. Music was playing and the big video screens were on, which gave us the chance to get our horses used to the sound and motion.

On Sunday, after the Fit to Compete Check, the Opening Ceremonies took place: The teams were introduced, speeches were given, the relay riders entered, and the baton was handed from the Dutch rider to the German rider to officially start the World Championships in Berlin. The famous Icelandic singer Helgi Björns performed live, singing a song he had written especially for this event.

Tuesday was the first really exciting day, as we rode in V1 Four Gait. Feykir and I finished with a mark of 6.43 and ended in the top half (19th place).

Wednesday gave us the chance to prepare for our T2 Loose Rein Tölt class. The scheduled trainings were

over, but it was possible to train on the competition track in the early morning or late at night. The training track and two dressage tracks were open for free training all day long. Due to the long way from the entrance to the team area, as well as from the team area to the oval track, my phone said we walked between 19 and 25 miles every day. I guess that kept us fit! Feykir and I finished our T2 program with 7.03, in a tie for 11th place. When Magnús Skúlason withdrew, we received a spot in the B-Finals!

Being allowed to enter the track for a final at the World Championships is truly something special. All the cheering and applauding of the audience is something you will never forget. The crowd was so much more “on” during the finals, and it was easy to feel that this was a special honor. We had a lot of fun and stayed focused until the end, finishing with a score of 6.79.

Representing the United States in the finals made me especially happy. I thank the USIHC for this chance, and I will continue always doing my best to make our team and country proud. I also want to thank my groom for the best support Feykir and I could wish for and Stephan Wolfstädter for his help as team leader, mentor, and trainer.



Photo by Krijn Buijelaar

program and all of the USIHC Riding Badge levels. Previous horse experience includes being owner of a large hunter/jumper barn, the administrator for a Pony Club Riding Center, and a competitor on the show jumping "A" circuit.

Virginia is passionate about the Icelandic breed. She was instrumental in the founding of Toppur Icelandic Horse Club, which has grown from five members to 37 in just three years. Virginia regularly serves as a breed ambassador, having exhibited her horses at the Iowa Horse Fair, the Midwest Horse Fair, and the International Omaha. She is also an active competitor, and took home the gold in T1 with her stallion Gosi frá Lambastöðum at Léttleiki Icelandics in 2017. She also competes in first-level dressage with her Icelandic gelding Herkules from Dalalif. Virginia is a classical singer by training and has performed throughout the U.S., Europe, and Asia. She currently serves on the USIHC Education and Breeding committees. Previous service includes Regional Club and Leisure Riding committees. By joining the Board, Virginia hopes to extend the presence of the Icelandic breed throughout the United States and to increase opportunities for riders in the Icelandic community through regional collaboration.

Martin Nielsen writes: Icelandic horses have been my life for the past 40 years, ever since my father bought the first horse for my mother. That led to the entire family becoming engaged in the growing Icelandic horse community in Denmark at the time. One horse led to two, which led to a few more, and then a foal. Suddenly, we had a stud farm, and my mother ran a riding school. I grew up with horse shows on the weekend, teaching lessons every afternoon, and Icelandic horse camps every summer. I have been involved with organizing all kinds of horse shows, ranging from tiny club shows with 20 participants to national, Nordic, and World Championships. I served as main announcer at several World Championships and one Landsmót. I served on the selection committee for the Danish National Team for two years. As a happy amateur, I have been a frequent competitor at shows and did spend a significant time in Iceland training and shoeing horses back in what seems like ancient times. Above all, I enjoy a good trail ride on a good horse—preferably five-gaited! I just have the Icelandic horse spirit in my blood and cannot imag-

ine a life without these critters.

I moved to the U.S. in 2011 with my family to pursue a job opportunity as a research scientist at the Gluck Equine Research Center at the University of Kentucky, as I am a veterinarian by training and hold a Ph.D. in equine parasitology. We have been fortunate to have been able to continue our life with Icelandic horses due to the activities offered by Léttleiki and Taktur here in central Kentucky. The Icelandic horse community in the United States is absolutely wonderful, and it reminds me in many ways of the pioneering spirit that existed in Denmark when I grew up. After eight years here, I feel it is time to give back to this community. I feel I have a few things to bring to the table. Lifelong experience with Icelandic horses, and perhaps also some historic perspective, as well as substantial show-organizing experience. But above all, I remain fundamentally enthusiastic about the Icelandic horse and what it means to all of us in everyday life. And, of course, parasite control. Very important!

Lucy Nold grew up in California, where she rode Icelandic horses from a very young age. She began breeding, training, and competing as a teenager and received many National Ranking awards in various classes over the years. At 14, she attended the FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland; in 2014, she was the U.S. team leader for the FEIF Youth Cup in Iceland. She is dedicated to supporting youth riders and, as a trainer and teacher, has enjoyed helping many young riders achieve their goals.

Lucy earned a B.S. in Animal Science, with a specialization in equines, from the University of California, Davis. After finishing her degree, she moved to the Pacific Northwest, where she owns and manages Five-Gait Farm, a full service training and breeding operation. Lucy is also a USIHC Sport Judge B and rode one of her stallions to become the highest evaluated U.S.-bred four-gaited stallion in America in 2018. Lucy is very dedicated to developing our Icelandic horse community here in the U.S. and growing the enthusiasm for this wonderful, versatile breed.

BOARD MEETINGS

The USIHC Board of Directors met by conference call on July 9, September 10, and October 8; there was no August meeting due to the World Championships. Complete minutes, including the monthly

Treasurer's and Secretary's reports, can be found online at www.icelandics.org/bod/ minutes. USIHC members are encouraged to listen in on the board meetings. The agenda and information on how to call in are posted on the USIHC website the weekend before.

In addition to topics already reported on, this quarter the board discussed options on sharing the *Quarterly* with members of the Canadian Icelandic Horse Federation, procedures for getting sanctioned events listed on the new USIHC website's calendar, the progress of the FEIF English speaking education collaborative group, applications for the 2020 FEIF Youth Cup, planning for 2020 FEIF breeding shows, the development of a new route for the 2020 Sea 2 Shining Sea virtual ride, assisting with the printing and distribution of the Knapamerki Riding Levels books in the U.S., and creation of an online list for riders regarding their sanctioned show class eligibility. Before the next World Championships, the Sport Committee will develop a sport code of conduct agreement that will include social media. Finally, two candidates, Maile Behringer and Mackenzie Pittman (Durbin) were approved to represent the U.S. at the 4th FEIF Young Leaders Event, held in the Netherlands on November 22-24.



Sandie Weaver was the S2SS Rider of the Month for July.



LEISURE RIDING

More than any other department, the leisure portfolio discloses the strengths and challenges faced by the ambitious project that is FEIF, and our stated mission of uniting people in their passion for the Icelandic horse.

It is (relatively) easy to bring together sport riders, who are driven by demonstrating their skills and those of their horses, in competition with others. It is also (relatively) easy to bring together breeders with the shared goal of protecting and improving the breed. Youth work focuses on a clearly defined group, and training trainers to the highest possible shared standards is completely goal-oriented.

But what about the rest of us?

In 1998, FEIF invited a new member to the board with the responsibility of looking after leisure riding. However, very quickly this new director saw himself faced with an impossible task. On the one hand, leisure riders make up by far the greatest proportion of Icelandic horse riders; on the other hand, almost by definition, leisure riders do not like to be organized, to follow rules, and to track a set of competitive goals.

Is it not one of the greatest pleasures to take your horse out into nature alone, tune into your environment, and leave everything else behind? And, at moments when we seek greater social engagement, to go out in (organized) group rides? And is that not more easily done at local or regional level? How then would a de-

partment of pleasure riding function on an international level?

Very soon, the attention turned to education, by what is meant the training of trainers, and the need for a comparable standard across the Icelandic horse world; the FEIF Education Department was born in 2002.

In 2012, the FEIF Board started the Leisure Riding Department again. This time the focus was less on literally bringing together non-competitive riders in joint events, but rather on providing services to the sector. This included projects regarding maps and long-distance routes and, of course, the work on the Riding Horse Profile, identifying strengths and areas for development in individual horses so as to find the best horse to match the needs and preferences of a buyer.

But what about “uniting people” at the international FEIF level?

The 21st century has not removed physical distances and only makes fumbling attempts in overcoming language barriers. But communication technology is making a huge difference in our ability to meet this FEIF goal. With that in mind, the virtual ride (see <https://www.feif.org/LeisureRiding/Virtual-Ride.aspx>) and the newly launched FEIF Instagram initiative (@feiforg) will help share our pleasure in the Icelandic horse, will motivate us to come together at big occasions such as the World Championships or Landsmót, and encourage us to use those opportunities to turn virtual contacts into real friends. The future will

tell.

“Hello Hella” is the name of the 8th FEIF virtual ride, which takes us to Hella, Iceland, home to the next Landsmót, the most important competition of the Icelandic horse in Iceland, to be held July 6-12, 2020. If you cannot participate in the real relay rides, why not join the virtual ride?

Participants start from home—wherever that is—and keep a record of all time spent in the saddle, collecting the kilometers to take you in the direction of Hella. The ride started on August 12, 2019, but you can join any time. From that date onwards, you take a note of—and add up—all miles/km you spend in the saddle hacking out. Every month you send in your total ridden kilometers, and your personal total distance is displayed on a common scoreboard. You will be astonished to see how far we all get.

Depending on where you live, the distance to Iceland may be quite daunting. This is why riders may form a team, and add their ridden distances together to get to the destination. The size of the team is somewhat determined by the total distance you have to achieve, and additional riders can join in at any time. Also remember, our horses are social creatures—they love good company. Team work is half the work, and shared fun is double the fun! It's free, it's fun, and you never know who you will meet on the way! Follow this link for further explanations, and the free registration: <https://feif-virtual.weebly.com/>



YOUTH WORK

Those involved with young people know that the new generation does things differently: They use a different language, they engage with different media, and most of all, young people everywhere are striving to do things better. Youth work is important to all organizations within FEIF: We want to promote good horsemanship skills, we want to encourage openness and curiosity in how things are done in different countries, and in a world of conflict and deep suspicion of strangers, we need to meet and learn to listen to others.

Furthermore, we want to ensure the future development of the FEIF world, led by people with experience, insight, and a shared vision.

Normally, when organizing an event such as a summer camp, or training events for children and young people, the ground work is done locally, regionally, or nationally. At the international level there are endless issues with costs, language, liability, transport, finding a date, and the list goes on. But a problem is only a problem if you cannot find a solution.

In that spirit, FEIF Youth Work began in 1988 with a FEIF Youth Camp held in the Netherlands, which has continued ever since in alternate years. The event is non-competitive, and participants do not bring their own horses. Instead the focus is on collaboration, making friends across the Icelandic horse world, and learning about the (horse) culture of the host nation.

In 1995 the first international FEIF Youth Cup was held in Luxembourg. The FEIF Youth Cup is an elite international sporting event, which happens every two years. Interested young people need to qualify at home, and some travel great distances to participate in a week spent in serious training and friendly competition. The development of top sport riders is mainly a national responsibility, but it becomes an international concern in the World Championships, where since 2013 there is a special award for young riders, complete with the title of Young Rider World Champion of a given discipline.

In spite of the fact that developments in social media and the internet have opened up great opportunities for collaborative work without borders, it is still true that effective youth work needs to be done on the ground, with real people and real horses. This is why since 2006, FEIF has recognized and also honored the effort and imaginative work of countless trainers, volunteers and parents with the FEIF Youth Country of the Year Award. Important for this prize is not the number of events that are organized, but the originality and effectiveness of wonderful initiatives some of which might be happening near you.

Taking into consideration the great many children and young people involved with the Icelandic horse worldwide, the number of participants in FEIF events is tiny. It is neither practical nor realistic to aim to involve all kids in international events. But what has happened, particularly in the last 10 years, is

that national associations have taken up the ideas of FEIF and created events run very much along the lines of the FEIF initiatives. That is a great development! At FEIF Youth Work, we take being copied as a compliment. This is also true of the Young Leaders' seminars that started in 2016, with the aim of bringing together and provide training and opportunities for (self-) development of our young volunteers and future co-workers.

Where do we go from here? There are moves ahead to invite young adults into all committees to participate and contribute to the work of FEIF. At the proud age of 50, it is time to prepare a new generation to take FEIF into a healthy and positive future.



CLUB UPDATES



Members of Tölt Alaska, the youth group of the Alaska Icelandic Horse Association, pose at the end of their summer camp. Photo by Robyn Schmutz.

There are 14 Regional Clubs and one Activity Club affiliated with the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress. To find the Regional Club nearest you, see the USIHC website at www.icelandics.org. The following clubs filed updates on their activities this quarter.

ALASKA

by Denise Chythlook

Falling in love with Alaska summers is easy most years, but between record heat and massive wildfires, Alaska was a temperamental place to live this year. In spite of that, the Alaska Icelandic Horse Association (AIHA) took full advantage of the brief summer months by hosting demos, a Steinar Sigurbjörnsson clinic, a Trausti Þór Guðmundsson Tölt in Harmony (now FEIF Figures) clinic, several Janet Mulder mini clinics, a young horse/breeding education day, a youth camp, a schooling show, and a USIHC-sanctioned sport show to cap off the season.

Tölt Alaska, our AIHA youth group led by Janet Mulder (FEIF International Trainer Level 1), had a very busy summer starting with a drill team demonstration at Anchorage's Equifest, an annual multi-discipline horse celebration. The

young club members, ages 8-17, then held a successful camp, with 13 riders learning basic horsemanship, farm management, trail riding, archery, swimming, and riding skills. The youth club also sent three riders to the North American Youth Cup: Wells Wappett, Robyn Schmutz, and Karli Schmutz attended; Ella Chythlook qualified but was unable to attend.

The AIHA Schooling Show, hosted by Arctic Arrow Farms with Lucy Nold as judge, was well attended and gave our club members a chance to train for the Second Annual AIHA Sanctioned Show, also hosted by Arctic Arrow Farms; Pétur Jökull Hákonarson judged 26 horse/rider combinations at the sanctioned show. The show not only capped our season, it gave club members a more comprehensive view of how the Icelandic horse has progressed in Alaska. Show participants achieved personal best scores, and the youth club members demonstrated that the AIHA's future is bright.

The AIHA's summer of 2019 truly showcased the many disciplines in which our members excel. Mounted archery (see the article in this issue), leisure

riding, dressage, pony club, 4H, long-distance riding, and equine therapy, along with showing and Figures, are just some of the ways the Icelandic horse is thriving in Alaska.

FLUGNIR

By Jackie Alschuler



Flugnir Club members enjoying the fall trail ride weekend at Tolthaven. Photo by Susy Oliver.



Susanna Loftness reports on her experience at the North American Youth Cup in the Flugnir Club's update, below. Photo by Steve Loftness.

Our members were busy this summer with clinics with Carrie Lyons-Brandt at Aslan's Country Icelandics in Proctor, MN in July and Tolthaven Icelandics in Pelican Rapids, MN in August. In September, Susy Oliver and her family hosted a fall trail ride weekend at Tolthaven, with two days of riding at nearby Maplewood State Park, archery on horseback at the farm, and a campfire cookout. Everyone had a wonderful time and all resolved to make it an annual event.

One Flugnir youth member, Susanna Loftness, attended the North American Youth Cup in Trout Lake, WA in July and filed the following report:

"The North American Youth Cup was an amazing learning experience, but an even better place to build lifelong friendships. My experience there was a blast, and I plan on being part of the next Youth Cup. I had no idea what was in store for me at the beautiful Red Feather Icelandic horse farm. There were four teams: green, purple, blue, and red. I was part of the red team and very excited about the week ahead.

"On the first day, everyone got together and played icebreaker games on the back lawn. At the same time, students were called to the barn to try horses. The trainers decided to put me on Kraftur, but changed to Vikingur after a couple of lessons.

"On Monday, each team got together to make up their team name and cheer. Our name was the Red-Hot Filly Peppers and we ended up winning the Team

Spirit award. I had my first lesson in the arena and then watched a demonstration on mounted archery and liberty work. My favorite part was when Caeli got her liberty horse, Sóldís, to sit down like a dog.

"On Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday each person had two riding lessons. We watched a presentation of the Icelandic horse's gaits as well. The four trainers and the judge explained how they first got into Icelandic horses and into horses in general, and shared their educations.

"On Friday, everyone went on a very exciting whitewater rafting adventure. We drove about seven miles, put on gear, and then got into our boats and paddled along the White Salmon River. There were Class 4 and one Class 5 waterfalls. Later we climbed a 20-foot cliff, with the option to jump into the river, which of course I did. Jumping into 38-degree water from 20 feet was pretty cool!

"Saturday and Sunday were show days, and both days went smoothly. At the awards ceremony on Sunday, I remember thinking how the end of Youth Cup came too quickly. It took me a couple of days to stop crying about leaving my amazing week at camp, but I can still text and see most people from camp through technology. My experience at the Youth Cup was truly amazing, and I plan to go back in 2021. To anyone else near my age in the horse world, I highly recommend that you come with me. A big thank you to everyone who donated so I could have this experience of a lifetime."

FRIDA

By Suzi McGraw

It was a quiet summer for the Frida Club this year in terms of organized activities, but that didn't stop our members from getting together to ride informally and to pursue learning opportunities provided by others. Several members attended Knapamerki clinics and completed one or more levels with success.

The club is grateful to member Antje Freygang for bringing German master-trainer Nicole Kempf to the U.S. to help riders and trainers throughout the country expand their skills. Nicole is an internationally certified judge and holds the highest credentials in training Icelandic horses. She has competed at the World Championships and is in constant demand as a clinician throughout Europe. In early September, Nicole worked with members of the Frida club at Montaire Icelandics in Middleburg, VA. She gave private lessons, worked individually with horses, and led a two-day clinic, during which she gave a ridden demonstration showing how she works to refine each of the gaits in a training session. The clinic participants and auditors also watched Nicole work with four young Icelandic horses as they were introduced to a longeline for the first time. The youngsters took it all in stride, showing a cooperative willingness to learn.

Millie Angelino and Pat Carballo represented our club drill team at the Tuckahoe Equestrian Center's Celebra-



Nicole Kempf and Suzi McGraw introduce Skorri from Windsong to a saddle for the first time at the Frida Club's clinic. Photo by Melissa Pyle.



Glitfaxes members Lisa Herbert, Wendy Taylor, and Nicki Esdorn (left to right) on a long trail ride at Point Reyes National Park in California.



At the Sæstaðir Sanctioned Fall show in Santa Cruz, Jenný from Thor Icelandics is ready to enter the ring for the Gaedingarfimi 1 class. Photo by Eleanor Anderson.

tion of the Horse in Maryland. They participated in a parade of breeds and then performed a pas de deux to music. The audience responded enthusiastically. Many chatted with the riders and some indicated interest in coming to watch our fall show, held at Montaire in Virginia on October 26-27.

GLITFAXA

by Gabriele Meyer

Our Glitfaxes members spent their summer either out on our area's beau-

tiful trails, or they traveled far. Nicki Esdorn and Pia Tucker trailered across the San Francisco Bay to participate in the Sæstaðir USIHC-sanctioned Fall show in Santa Cruz, CA. Nicki rode her two mares, Álfrún frá Hrafnstöðum and Jenný from Thor Icelandics, in the new Gaeðingafimi classes. She reports: "Gaeðingafimi is Icelandic freestyle dressage with music, designed to show the flow and harmony between horse and rider, and, of course, the beauty and personality of the horse. My mares are very different horses; one is five-gaited and fiery, the other four-gaited and elegant. So my coach, Laura Benson, and I devised two very different freestyles. It was so much fun, and we did well! Laura rode her golden stallion Lykill frá Stóra-Ási to a very beautiful, flowy dancelike program; their performance gave me goosebumps. Gaeðingafimi Levels 1 and 2 are still demonstration classes, but will hopefully become sanctioned by the USIHC next year."

Pia Tucker brought Jenný's half-brother, Rauði-Gandi from Dalalif (aka Red), to the show. She recounts, "I went to the Sæstaðir show to expand my horizons in all things Icelandic horse. The show committee, their friends, spouses, etc., did a great job! The show was well organized and had great camaraderie. Comments by judge Will Covert were helpful and constructive. Laura

Benson had made herself available for lessons the day before, and that went a long way toward demystifying all the various V's and F's, although clearly Red and I have a way to go before we are fluent in 'show speak.' The new Gaeðingafimi freestyle was interesting, in how everyone put their own spin on it; it was definitely an inspiring class that I would like to attempt again."

Our "very far travelers" were Julie Ryan and Henriette Bruun, who independently went to Berlin to watch the Icelandic Horse World Championships. The horse stadium must have been huge and crowded, because Julie and Henriette managed to not bump into each other, and found out about their club mate being there only when we prepared this report.

Both loved the event. Julie reports: "I was in Berlin for the event in 2013 as well, and this year's event appeared to be quite a bit larger. The stands were full, and there seemed to be many more vendors. I loved walking around and watching the practice rides going on at the various tracks. I really enjoyed the wonderful musical ride performed by 16 young riders and done to an energetic tólt. The music was from Mary Poppins, the costumes were beautiful, and the crowd loved it!"

Henriette chimes in: "My travels this summer in Europe took me to Berlin the same weekend as the World Championship B-finals took place in Berlin-Karlshorst. It was very easy to get to the event from the city and it was



Hestafolk member Susan Porter Johnson with her mares, Lucy from Extreme Farm and Vordís from Silver Creek, at Keene's Horse Camp, with Mt. Adams in the background. Photo by Susan Boyd.



Hestafolk member Alys Culhane and her husband took three horses and a dog on a long ride on the Continental Divide. See the story in this issue. Photo by Pete Praetorius.

super well organized. It is absolutely amazing to see the best horses in the world fly around the beautiful track in slow or fast tölt, while the music is blasting out of the speakers, flags are waving, and the audience is clapping. How do they do it? It was very impressive!”

HESTAFOLK

by Lisa McKeen

What a busy summer we had, with new horses, and new members. Some of us have been seriously getting out on the trails. Alys Culhane, for example, spent three months packing and trekking in Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana. Driving down and back to her home in Alaska, her three mares (Raudhetta, Tyra, and Hrimfara) were worthy Icelandic ambassadors at rest areas and visitor centers. Alys answered innumerable questions about the breed’s history, training, and care, and gave USHC brochures to anyone interested.

Susan Porter Johnson is another dedicated and savvy trail rider. She lost a horse this summer and found a new partner in Vordis from Silver Creek. We love a chance to ride with her and learn about new trails or areas to ride in.

New member Mary Chamberlin attended a clinic at Tuskast in Merritt, BC. The instructors were Linda Pétursdóttir and Caeli Cavanagh. Mary rode a 15-year-old mare named Kleo in a fun atmosphere, where she learned a lot.

On September 13-15, Mary, Kathy Lockerbie, and Freya Sturm attended a Tölt in Harmony clinic conducted by Trausti Þór Guðmundsson at Fitjamyri in Vernon, BC. It was a wonderful experience, they reported, and Trausti is a fabulous instructor. Mary rode Ljúfa, a four-year old mare; she had ridden Ljúfa in July and liked her then—she liked her even more in September. Although concerned that she was young and early in her training, by Saturday evening Mary knew she was the horse for her. Others at the clinic also said the two were a good match. Congratulations, Mary.



NEIHC member Heleen Heyning coaches a Delhi College Animal Behavior student during an Intrinzen demonstration. Photo by Nick George.

NEIHC

by Jess Haynsworth

This was one of the most competition-heavy summers we can remember in the Northeast. On July 20-21, Solheimar Farm in Tunbridge, VT hosted a USIHC-sanctioned sport competition judged by Þorgeir Guðlaugsson. The show was fun, laid-back, and highly educational, with a great attendance by youth riders especially. Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir and Magnéa frá Syðri-Reykjum were the champions of the Open Division. Amelie Maranda and Mila frá Skriðu were champions of the Youth Division. Solheimar also offered a number of fun and creative classes, making the show exciting for riders of all ages and abilities.

On August 19-25, Mad River Valley Icelandics in Warren, VT hosted a USIHC Riding Badge camp. Six kids attended. Each morning they took care of the horses and stables and had riding lessons focusing on different topics such as learning how to longe, riding bareback, trail riding, mounted games, and preparing for competitions. Each afternoon, instructor Jess Haynsworth taught a seminar, followed by a practical hands-on lesson and a fun activity related to the day’s lecture topic. These included animal welfare, ethical training and husbandry, equine health and wellness, history of the Icelandic



Arianna DeForge and Brynjar frá Efri-Rauðalæk dressed as a unicorn and mysterious forest sprite for the costume class at the Solheimar Open Show in July. Photo by Damian DeForge.

horse, our current breeding and riding standards, conformation and biomechanics, and Icelandic competition. Throughout the week, the campers studied for various USIHC Riding Badge levels. FEIF-certified trainer Jana Meyer tested them at week's end. Josie Nicholas and Keziah Dunn each earned a Competition Level 1 Riding Badge. Arianna DeForge earned her Basic Level 2 Riding Badge. Megan Morse and Judson Hally each earned a Basic Level 1 Riding Badge. Josie, Keziah, and Arianna had each earned badges at last year's camp, and Jana was impressed with their improvement. Following the camp, the four youngest campers competed in a Flag Race and Ice Cream Tölt (our version of beer tölt). The week was a lot of fun, and we are already planning next year's Riding Badge camp.

September 1-2 brought a FEIF Breeding Evaluation at the Cobleskill fairgrounds in New York. The highest evaluated horse was Zophonías from Vinland, owned and bred by Martina Gates; he scored first prize at 8.17 overall. Amy Goddard writes: "Many thanks to everyone who helped support our recent NY FEIF Breeding Evaluations! The silent auctions raised over \$500 and the GoFundMe over \$2500. We appreciate each and every donation, as breeding shows are quite costly to host." (For more on the evaluations, see the USIHC News in this issue.) Following the show, Hólar graduate Helga Una Björnsdóttir taught a Knapamerki clinic at Heleen Heyning's

West Wind Farm in Delhi, NY. Participants were able to test for Levels 1 and 2, after three days of intensive riding instruction.

September 12-15, the USIHC held a FEIF Judging Seminar at the Hotel Coolidge in Woodstock, VT, with practical judging at Sue Sundstrom's Echo Ledge Farm. The instructor and head examiner was Þorgeir Guðlaugsson, the second examiner was Jana Meyer, and the organizer was Leslie Chambers. The seminar began with two days of classroom work covering ethics, mental factors that influence judging (attention, fatigue, processing limitations), the FEIF Judging Guidelines (attention to the firewalls), rules, prohibited equipment, and health (vet checks).

The newest addition to the seminar was a section on LAP (Lateral Advanced Placement). This is an analysis of gait derived from the pioneering work of Milton Hildebrand in his "Symmetrical Gaits of Horses" (1965) and using modern technology developed by Gunnar Reynisson in "Analysis of Movement in Pace and Tölt in the Icelandic Horse" (2017). Using video analysis, we can calculate the LAP for each stride a horse takes in a symmetrical gait (pace, tölt, and trot). In perfect-beat tölt, the LAP is 25%, while pace is close to 0%, and trot is 50% (you get an idea where this scale is going). We hope to feature LAP in a future issue of the *Quarterly*.

The third day began with practical judging of riders who volunteered to

ride a variety of sanctioned show classes, followed by a demonstration of shoeing and equipment checks, as well as health checks. All attendees had an opportunity to practice these checks. The rest of the day was devoted to theory testing, and on the final day was video testing. This round of testing did not result in any new judges.

The USIHC adopted this program in 2014, and the Judging Seminar has been offered yearly at a variety of locations. Since the program began, a total of eight candidates have qualified.

On September 20, West Wind Farm in Delhi, NY hosted an Intrinzen Demo. Amy Goddard writes: "Eighteen Animal Behavior students from Delhi College, along with several visitors, attended the Introduction to Intrinzen.

Heleen, Sally Scofield, and Amy Goddard followed basically the same syllabus as for last year's college students' visit. Heleen introduced the Icelandic horse breed and explained the basic philosophy of Intrinzen. Amy presented a lecture on operant conditioning, and described the distinctions between posi-



Carrie Brandt demonstrating the target "safe space" during a liberty demonstration for the Sirius Club.



Sirius Club members Sherry Hoover, Ron Hoover, and Frances Rospotynski (left to right) tried—and failed—to get their horses to pose for a photo after a fun ride in Brecksville Park in Ohio.

tive and negative reinforcement. She also explained the importance of autonomy, and defined the concept of intrinsic motivation and how it develops throughout Intrinzen training. Sally introduced a new horse to Intrinzen, demonstrating how to get started training a horse using positive reinforcement. Next, Heleen and Sally presented two advanced horses, Kraftur and Duna, who enthusiastically performed their ‘fancy’ movements for the audience. Finally, several students volunteered to work with a horse, learning how to use a clicker, and the importance of posture and body awareness when ‘dancing’ with horses.”

September 21-22, Solheimar Farm hosted another USIHC-sanctioned competition, this one judged by Alex Dannenman. Despite very hot weather for the time of year, the show was well-attended and packed with fun classes for riders of all ages and abilities, as well as the usual FEIF classes. Jess Haynsworth was champion of the Open Division aboard Vigri frá Vallanesi. Amelie Maranda was champion of the Youth Division aboard Míla frá Skriðu.

October 4-6, several riders from the NEIHC attended the Léttleiki Icelandics World Ranking show in Kentucky. This show provides a special opportunity for U.S. riders to become World Ranked

by offering three separate shows over three days. Riders must earn three sets of scores over 5.5 in World Ranking classes in order to make the official World Ranking list. From the NEIHC, Jess Haynsworth and Vigri frá Vallanesi became World Ranked in T1. Riders could also earn Triple Ice Championship awards for their combined scores over the three days. Northeast riders Liesl Kolbe and Amelie and Isabelle Maranda earned 11 Triple Ice Championships among them. Curtis Pierce helped ship horses from the Northeast, making it possible for NEIHC riders to compete.



Sirius club members at the Ultimate Obstacle clinic, held at Taktur Icelandics, watch and practice groundwork skills with Terral Hill (far right) before starting the obstacle events training.

Thank you, Curt!

As this issue goes to press, we are getting ready for Equine Affaire! Icelandic horses will be well-represented in Springfield, MA from November 7-10. Emily Potts coordinated the NEIHC booth, Merrimack Valley Icelandics organized the breed demos, the Horses of Iceland marketing team presented in-hand demos, and The Knights of Iceland demonstration team was featured in the evening Fantasia.

SIRIUS

By Frances Rospotynski & Sherry Hoover

It was a hot summer, but the heat did not stop members of the Sirius Ohio Kentucky Icelandic Horse Club from attending the “Fit to Ride” clinic hosted by Lettleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY on August 18-19. Individual riding evaluations were done on a “barrel horse” by clinician Heather Sansom, who explained ways to stretch while mounted to improve your seat. Heather explained the goal as being SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timetabled). Writes Frances: “Heather’s EquiFITT program gave me a better understanding of why my horse was having trouble traveling to the left. The Fit to Ride program is the complete package to help us maintain our fitness and to be better riders.” Heather offers individual training via Skype and has a book, “Fit to Ride,” available on Amazon; contact her at personaltraining@equifitt.com.

Other members of the club went trekking in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park on August 18. Surrounded by

several large cities, this park in northeast Ohio is the most visited National Park in the nation. It features many waterways, including parts of the Ohio Erie Canal. Members Ron and Sherry Hoover and Frances Rospotynski met at the Brecksville Stables and explored the beautiful trails crossing water and bridges. We had a wonderful ride and beautiful weather, and Ron spotted an owl resting in the tall treetops.

The club and Taktur Icelandics in Prospect, KY organized The Ultimate Obstacle Clinic on September 28-29. We had 11 horse and rider teams, with 2 auditors. Saturday began with Terral Hill teaching natural horsemanship groundwork. Terral had each group apply what they had learned about working in hand to guide their horses over 11 obstacles, including a teeter-totter bridge, L-shaped platform, water crossing, trailer loading, gate, noodle curtain, mailbox with jacket, balloon pop, giant ball, coin exchange, and drag.

While Terral coached each team over the obstacles, Carrie Brandt gave personal lessons in the indoor arena. During our lunch break, Carrie and Terral treated us to an impressive demonstration of liberty training. Then Gino Zoppe and his wife, Morgan, demonstrated Italian bareback vaulting and juggling on a beautiful draft cross named Rocco.

All riders were mounted on the second day of the clinic. Terral guided each rider through each obstacle, reassuring them that they could do the task at hand. He offered tips and encouragement until success was achieved. Carrie continued in the indoor arena with two rider groups for gait training.

During that lunch break, Carrie gave an informative lecture on the biomechanics of the horse. We learned about gait, stride, weight bearing, release, lift, and rhythm. The tölt was examined, from trotty to pacey. She even taught us how to tölt with our fingers. (We all needed lots of finger tölting practice to do what our horses do so easily!)

To finish our fun-filled weekend, we rode as a drill team. First, we walked the pattern several times, tacked up and again walked the pattern on horseback, working on watching our end or middle to stay in line. Next we rode tölt and did the pattern again in groups of four, using the speed and control skills we had



At the Toppur Fall Show, Carrie Lyons Brandt shows tölt on Mirra frá Kambi, owned by Charlotte Riley. Photo by Susy Oliver.

learned on the obstacle course. Our gait training, control of our horse's body, speed, and position helped us to stay in line and correctly complete our drill team pattern. It was lots of fun too!

Over Labor Day weekend, Lettleiki Icelandics offered an Adult Horse Camp. Colleen McCafferty writes: "Growing up in the suburbs of Cleveland, riding horses never came up in conversation. We rode bikes, not horses. As the third of seven kids, going to camp was never an option for me either. One night, however, on the way back from my grandparents' house, my father made an unexpected turn into a festival. He let me ride a pony, led in a circle on a 'turn-table.' I was

hooked, but that feeling stayed dormant for a very long time.

"Fast-forward to Equine Affair many years ago, where I watched The Knights of Iceland ride through the dark with sparklers blazing. I now have three Icelandic horses—but that's a different story. When I saw that Lettleiki Icelandics was offering an Adult Horse Camp it ignited another hidden burn: I could go to camp! With Icelandics! I invited three friends to join me and the other seven campers; we had a great time, and learned a lot about the breed, our horses, the instructors, and ourselves. We stayed in the historic guest house on Swallowland Farm (which was itself a treat). The



The winners of the lead-line class are interviewed by Heimir Gunnarsson. Photo by Jody Roback.



Maria Octavo on Rós (Sólmyrkva) from Helms Hill rides canter in F1 Five Gait at the Toppur Fall Show. Photo by Susy Oliver.

first night we were introduced to the new additions: two young colts and a filly. We then headed to the barn, where we learned about the WorldFengur database and tried our skills at virtual breeding, based on stats of sires and mares to see what our breeding pairs could potentially create.

“For riding, each of us was assigned a horse, and we had lessons on tölt, taking into consideration our horse’s particular style, and potential issues with staying in gait (both for the horse and for ourselves). We were introduced to a pattern in the arena that we would ride the next day, in tölt, to our music of choice, and be ‘judged’ by our instructors in front of our fellow campers. Just a little pressure...

“On Sunday we had the pleasure of riding a first-prize stallion, Spörður frá Bergi, while our instructors gave us exercises to strengthen and lengthen our muscles, and pointers to correct our posture and seat. We had a trail ride and ended our weekend with our individual Tölt in Harmony performance to music, followed by a Pilates lesson to stretch our limbs.

“The instructors, along with organizer Maggie Brandt, put on a rewarding and fun experience. We got to go to camp as adults, learned a lot along the way, and all got ribbons for our Tölt in Harmony! What could be better?”

TOPPUR

by Virginia Lauridsen

Toppur Icelandic Horse Club had a busy summer! September 14-15 marked our second USIHC-sanctioned sport show, and preparations began in the spring. The new oval track at Harmony Icelandics in Peru, IA was progressing rapidly, and excitement about the event

gathered momentum along with it. Members gathered frequently to ensure that the lengthy checklist was complete and that the show would run smoothly. Show secretary Cindy Niebuhr kept us all on task with her superb organizational skills. Committee members Liz Appel, Teresa Herold, Lori Cretney, Roxanne Antisdel, Daniela West, Lisa Blumhagen, and Virginia Lauridsen divided duties so that we all could enjoy the weekend.

The entries began arriving in late August, and by the final tally we hosted 46 horse and rider combinations. Wow—it was terrific! The best part might have been the crowded lead-line class. Judge Will Covert and his family arrived on Friday evening and were gracious enough to help with details such as the sound system. Breeding judge Heimir Gunnarsson, who was in Iowa for the FEIF Breeding Evaluation, jumped in as announcer extraordinaire. Flugnir member Deb Cook once again served as our “Ice Test” queen. It was a real team effort. Most of the club either rode or worked or both. Even the competitors helped. A special thank you to Maggie Brandt, who stepped in whenever she saw an opportunity. It was a joy to see all of the smiles and camaraderie. As usual, the Iowa weather looked unpredictable, but the



Jonah Roback and Gnyr frá Morastöðum compete in the trail class. Photo by Jody Roback.



rains decided to spare us this year.

The show was a rousing success, with riders and horses arriving from eight states. Every class had entries. Our “fun” classes were especially fun, and we were thrilled to see so many youth riders. Several riders joined the educational seminars on breeding topics hosted by Harmony Icelandics on Thursday and Friday. Saturday evening featured a delicious Asian-inspired dinner at the farm lodge, giving everyone an opportunity to interact with fellow Icelandic horse fans. Will made himself available to competitors who were interested in how to improve their scores for the finals. By the time the last rider finished the Countryside Riding class on Sunday, we were all exhausted, but thoroughly satisfied. We definitely plan to make this an annual event, but perhaps earlier in the summer.

In late September, Toppur members Lisa Blumhagen and Liz Appel joined up with Flugnir member Raven Flores for a horse camping and riding trip at Forestville Mystery Cave State Park in Minnesota. They enjoyed riding the stunning trails throughout the park, crossing a river, a creek and a wooden bridge. It was loads of fun, despite a little rain, and proved to be great exercise – a true testament to the stamina and diligence of the Icelandic breed!

Scenes from the Toppur Fall Show, clockwise: Kydee Sheetz pacing Dama von der Krähenweide; photo by Susy Oliver. The ever-popular beer tölt; photo by Jody Roback. Susy Oliver shows off her winning smile after riding Green Horse Tölt on Stjarni from Tolthaven; photo by Jody Roback. Kydee Sheetz on Tandri from Aslan’s County Icelandics riding fast tölt, and Virginia Lauridsen showing her stallion, Gosi frá Lambastöðum; both photos by Maria Octavo.



ON PRAISE

BY NICKI ESDORN

On a recent trail ride, my mare Jenny was in a very good mood. It was a cool morning, an endless trail led through the sunlit woods, the footing was good, and we were in good company. Jenny is a young four-gaited Icelandic, so for her tölt is a gait she needed to figure out under saddle.

We walked, we cantered, and then downshifted into tölt. Jenny felt fantastic, she carried herself on a loose rein, her rhythm was a perfect four-beat, and she was dancing along with her companion, a good tölter.

After what seemed like a long, wonderful time, I relaxed my seat and legs, dropped the reins, and when Jenny stopped, I took my feet out of the stirrups and jumped off. “Oh my god, what’s wrong?” asked my riding friend.

“Nothing’s wrong! This is the best tölt she has ever done! It was a super effort and I am giving her the biggest praise I can think of right now! My friend Gabriele calls it the ‘Jolli dismount,’ because Eyjólfur Ísólffson, the famous trainer, taught it,” I said, rubbing Jenny’s forehead on the spot where she likes to be scratched. As we continued, me walking next to my proud mare, my friend and I started talking about how and why we praise our horses.

PRAISE ENOUGH?

We know by now that the old saying “Not scolded (or beaten) is praise enough” is terrible. It is outdated and describes, at best, training based on fear. A fearful horse is a dangerous horse. Fear can easily escalate into spooking, running away, high tension, and, if cornered, even aggression.

Luckily, our modern training concepts are kinder. Trainers commonly teach the horse to yield to pressure. The drawback of this method is that it rarely motivates the horse to want to please by making an extra effort; neither does it encourage the horse to form a bond with its rider. For that, we need to train by reward.

Rewarding a wanted behavior shows the horse clearly what is desired and motivates it into putting in more effort the next time. It is much safer and more fun to be with a confident and relaxed animal.

Of course, a treat like a cookie or carrot is a very clear and immediate re-

ward. Using treats works well when a good protocol is established. The treat must be a reward, not a bribe. Think “Now that you did this great thing, you get one,” not “If you do this, you get one.” The horse never gets a treat for mugging you, only as a (surprise) reward, gently taken with the lips from your outstretched hand. Don’t give treats for nothing; at least ask the horse for a step back or to the side.

While riding, a walk break allowing the horse to stretch its head down to the ground is a nice reward. Letting the horse slowly “chew the reins out of your hands” is a wonderful tool for relaxation.

Hard slaps on the neck? Meaningless for the horse and probably even uncomfortable. However, a gentle scratching that copies how horses groom each other works well. Horses like to be scratched in places they cannot reach themselves, like their withers or forehead. Watch your horse’s expression: You found the right spot when they wiggle their lips and show you how much they like the interaction.

It is also important to reward immediately! Do not hesitate for more than a few seconds, otherwise the horse will not connect the action to the reward.

WHAT IS PRAISE?

Praise is human language, not horse language. To the horse, words like “Good boy” have no intrinsic meaning. In order for praise to be understood, we need to follow it with something the horse actually likes and wants: a treat or a stretch or a favorite scratch.

Besides praising after an action, praise words can be given as encouragement during a difficult or new exercise, meaning “You are doing great—a bit more please.” But the words then must be followed by an actual reward to keep the horse motivated.

Many successful horse trainers, even at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, use something like the Jolli dismount as a high form of praise for extravagant effort or for learning something difficult and new. This way of rewarding should be used much more often. Nothing else lets the horse know how much we appreciate it!

Finally, we need to remind ourselves to adopt an attitude of appreciation. We should praise whenever we can when we are around our horses. Something wonderful happens then: We share the feeling of a job well done and feel greatly rewarded ourselves!

Author’s note: Thanks to Gabriele Meyer for talking through this idea with me.

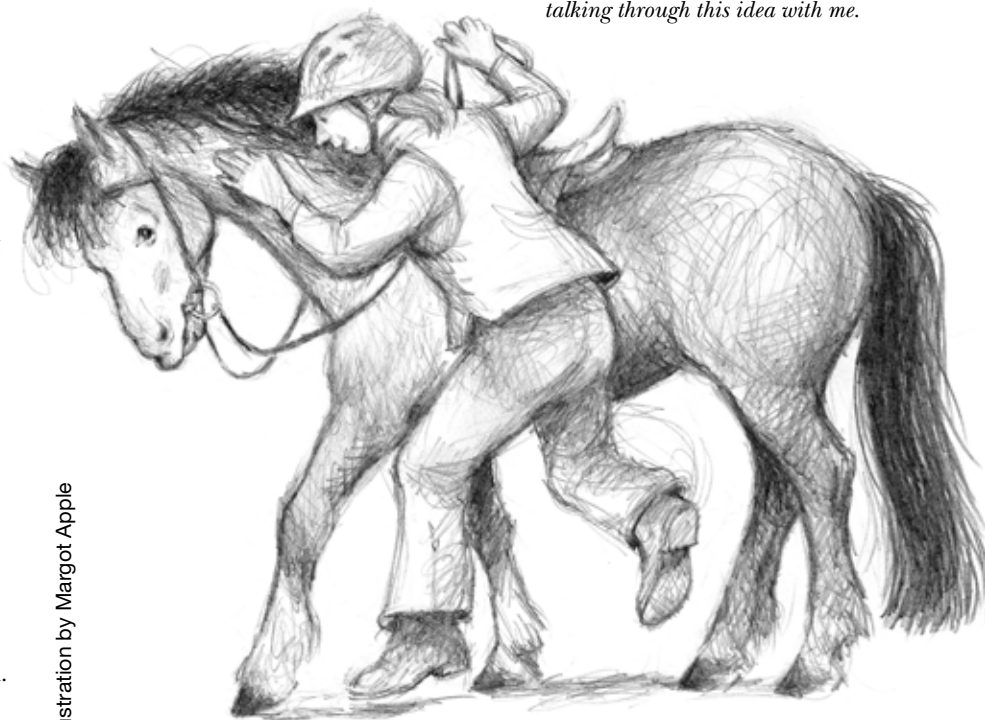


Illustration by Margot Apple

LET'S JUMP!

BY JESS HAYNSWORTH

One question enthusiasts new to the breed often ask is, Can Icelandic horses jump? To which the answer is, Yes—of course they can!

The ability to hurdle over obstacles is an important adaptation for prey animals like horses. However, jumping an obstacle while in flight from a predator is not the same thing as jumping a course with a rider. Just because horses are capable of throwing themselves over an obstacle doesn't mean that doing so will be good for their bodies—particularly if they are out of balance on the approach or the landing, or are overtaxed by the size of the jump. When used appropriately, jumping can be a beneficial form of cross-training for Icelandic riding horses.

Here are some things to consider when deciding whether or not to utilize jumping as a form of cross-training for your horse.

WHY CROSS-TRAINING?

Variety is the spice of life, but when it comes to movement for an athlete, variation is absolutely key to maintaining comfort, soundness, and longevity. It is generally accepted that repetitive motion is a recipe for injury. Drilling a horse in any one exercise puts them at risk for damage caused by repetitive wear and tear, such as soft tissue injuries, tendon and ligament issues, stiffness and soreness, and, over time, joint problems such as arthritis. Horses can also become irritable, anxious, or "sour" when forced to do the same thing day after day.

For their mental and physical health, I try to ensure that the horses in my program never do the same thing two days in a row. Last week, for example, I took my competition horse, Vigri frá Vallanesi, to an Icelandic sport competition. His week leading up to the show looked like this:

- Sunday: Dressage work in the arena
- Monday: Long distance conditioning ride (15 miles or so, with structured trot/tölt and canter sets, monitoring respiration recovery afterwards)
- Tuesday: Longeing over small jumps in the arena
- Wednesday: Day off
- Thursday: Icelandic sport style compe-



Preparation is key: Before letting her horses jump, Jess takes the time to develop a clear, balanced canter. Jumping from a lateral gait like tölt risks the horse hurting or scaring itself trying to make it over the obstacle. Photo by Em Potts.

tion training, practicing competition program transitions and speed variation out on the dirt roads

- Friday: Ponying off another horse on the trails and dirt roads
- Saturday: Competition (preliminaries)
- Sunday: Competition (finals)

While Vigri's primary sport is Icelandic sport competition, we also compete in competitive distance riding and in local hunter paces, because we have found that conditioning for endurance and jumping-style competitions improves his performance in Icelandic sport shows.

Vigri and I learned the value of cross-training the hard way, when I first brought Vigri to a sport competition in Kentucky. The show was a 20-hour drive (one way!) from our home in Vermont, and Vigri was exhausted after the hours spent balancing on the trailer. While he performed well enough in the competition, the drive home from the show was even harder on his body. After that trip, I

vowed to begin cross-training with more structured distance riding to improve his endurance for long trailer rides.

Very quickly, I felt the benefits of this cross-training on his competitive performance, and began adding in other elements to his and my other horses' routines as well—including jumping. Vigri's scores have improved steadily as we have pursued these extracurricular activities, as has his topline, fitness, comfort, and overall attitude. This year, after scoring the highest he ever has in a show, he stepped off the trailer from Kentucky in gorgeous posture, showing almost no signs of fatigue. That shows me the program is working.

WHY JUMPING?

Jumping can be an excellent form of cross-training, because it encourages the horse to stretch his back and topline as he bascules (extends his neck and arches his back over the peak of the jump). It provides a mental and physical challenge for the horse that can be fun and naturally motivating, as long as he has been

adequately conditioned and prepared for the exercise. It can also encourage the horse to self-regulate and balance the basic gaits (trot and canter), and can focus and entertain a horse who becomes easily bored or distracted during arena work.

I learned to ride at a hunter/jumper stable, and competed throughout my teens in both the hunter/jumper and eventing worlds. This gave me the opportunity to ride and train a wide variety of breeds over fences. I have found that introducing Icelandic horses to jumping for cross-training purposes presents some unique challenges, along with countless benefits to my horses' bodies and minds.

RISKS

Jumping is a high-impact activity that can present serious risks to equine health and safety. The repetitive motion of jumping can also cause undue wear and tear to horses' bodies over time. When I competed in jumping sports, my trainers taught me that each horse only has so many good jumps in him. Trained horses jumped almost exclusively at shows and were trained primarily "on the flat" at home, to save their bodies. Therefore, it is important not to drill horses needlessly over fences.

Whenever we ask our horses to jump, we risk injury. These risks are limited greatly when horses are adequately prepared and appropriately introduced to jumping exercises, but the risk always exists. Even when we use jumps that fall down easily—like poles on jumping blocks or standards with safety cups—there is

always the possibility that the horse could misjudge the distance and fall down. The worst rotational fall I ever witnessed happened in a children's 2'3" hunter course, over a jump that was designed to easily fall if the horse rubbed a rail. The horse caught his knees on the pole and flipped over, landing on his rider.

It does not take such a catastrophic accident as this to shatter a horse's confidence over fences, however. As prey animals, horses are naturally fearful of losing their balance—after all, it does not matter how fast you can run or how high you can jump if you are going to wipe out in front of a predator. Awkward or poorly timed approaches to and landings from jumps can frighten horses just as badly as an accident, and this fear can cause them to chronically refuse or "run out" rather than jumping on cue. In their desire to keep their balance and clear the obstacle, there also exists the risk of an unbalanced horse straining something while pushing themselves awkwardly over a fence.

Therefore I feel it is extremely important to take any amount of jumping very seriously, even at the lowest heights. Preparation is key to making sure that each horse has a safe and positive experience.

TRAIN THE BASIC GAITS

Gaited horses should not be asked or allowed to jump from a four-beated or lateral gait, like tölt/rack or pace. In order to jump safely and sustainably, a horse should use a clear trot or canter. These gaits will give them the moment of suspension they need to push off and

jump, and will allow them to arrange their legs and bodies correctly to jump in a safe and healthy way.

Horses can sometimes make it over fences from a tölt or pace, but the jump will be awkward and poorly timed, risking injury. Tölt has, by definition, no moment of suspension (this is what makes it smooth to ride) and pace has, by definition, no collection, with the legs traveling in lateral pairs. This makes it very challenging for the horse to regulate stride length on approach, collect the haunches underneath the body, and push off over the fence for a correct and clean take-off over the fence.

A very lateral "walking-behind" canter presents similar dangers when jumping, as does cross-canter (disunited canter). There are an unfortunate number of videos on YouTube that show gaited horses being asked to jump from lateral gaits or from a poor-quality, lateralized canter, and very often they do take down rails as they careen over the fence. When they manage to clear it, they are often throwing themselves over using one hind leg, tucking the other hind awkwardly underneath the body or hanging their knees dangerously. Horses jumping from lateral gaits or from a cross-canter or a very four-beated canter will very likely be unable to achieve a decent bascule or landing. They may scare themselves trying to clear jumps this way, which could poison the whole exercise by making them anxious or sour. Therefore it is important not to use tölt or pace when jumping Icelandic horses, and to spend the time developing a very clear and balanced trot and canter before introducing Icelandic horses to jumping.

For gaited horses that do not already possess a clear trot or canter, it is best to spend time working on these gaits before attempting to jump the horse. I find it helpful to put each gait on a clear vocal cue, which can add clarity during the excitement of a jumping session. Lines of ground poles properly spaced for trot or canter can be used to evaluate how clear and regular a horse's basic gaits may be. If the horse struggles to regulate his basic gaits over properly positioned ground poles—tripping, stumbling, or knocking the poles rather than easily stepping over them, for example—the horse likely needs more dressage work to train and strengthen the basic gaits before jumps are added into the mix.

If a horse breaks into tölt or pace on the approach to a jump, it is best to circle the horse away from the jump and reset



Jess uses a longline, rather than free-jumping her horses, so that if they break into a lateral gait on their approach, she can circle them away from the jump and rebalance them. Photo by Em Potts.

rather than to risk the horse straining, hurting, or scaring themselves trying to make it over the jump—keeping in mind that even a small jump can shatter a horse's confidence or cause a serious injury.

FROM THE GROUND

When introducing my horses to any new exercise, I prefer to work from the ground, rather than under saddle. Many people like to introduce jumping to horses using a method called “free jumping.” Normally, a chute is created using poles or temporary fencing, and horses are encouraged to run down the chute and jump over fences positioned within the chute. Sometimes this same effect is achieved simply by placing fences along the perimeter of an arena and letting the horse jump at liberty.

I prefer to use a longeline rather than free-jumping my horses, when they are new to jumping. That way, if they lose balance and break into a lateral gait on their approach to the jump, I am able to circle them away from the jump and rebalance them rather than letting them crash over the jump or strain something attempting to clear it awkwardly. I would not use a longeline with a taller jump standard, however, as there is some risk that the line could become tangled. For this reason, I prefer to use plastic jump blocks instead, which can be purchased through most tack shops. If taller jump standards are being used, it is probably safest to use free jumping, making sure to take the time to put each gait on a vocal cue and ensure that the gaits are balanced and consistent before adding the excitement of jumps. Even well-trained gaited horses can become pacey and stiff through their backs when they are excited. Placing properly spaced ground poles in between jumps may help reduce risk of the horse breaking gait.

BE AN INCREMENTALIST

Whether free-jumping or longeing over fences, it is important to start small. I like to begin with one pole on the ground, between the blocks or standards, and let the horse step over that a few times. As I am a clicker trainer, I want a nice easy moment like this to mark. For those using other training methods, it is a good confidence-building moment to pat or verbally praise the horse and keep things fun and positive.

Next, I like to make a half-cross-rail, with one pole lying on the ground, and one pole raised a few inches off the ground on one side. That way, the horse

can get an idea for stepping over something raised, but can choose the lower end if he prefers. Once he is confidently stepping over a half-crossrail, I progress to a full crossrail. Crossrails are a great first jump because they encourage the horse to jump the middle of the fence, as that is the lowest point of the fence.

For the first several jumping sessions, I like any jump I present the horse with to be low enough for him to step over without properly jumping. That way, even if we do get an awkward approach, the risk of injury is very low. I keep sessions short, being careful not to drill the horse, as the entire purpose of cross-training is to break movement patterns and habits, and encourage the horse to use his body differently from his normal work. I reward often, being very careful to watch for signs of fear, reluctance, or fatigue.

TROUBLESHOOT

If a horse is struggling with small fences, I do not progress to larger fences. Instead, I evaluate why. If the horse is refusing to jump, or knocking down/stumbling over small obstacles, this is important feedback. Back pain, hoof pain, ulcers, issues with tack fit, or other discomforts may come to light when introducing a horse to something new like jumping.

Most horses should happily and willingly pop over a very small obstacle, if introduced to it slowly and appropriately. If horses are demonstrating extreme reluctance or struggling to clear small obstacles, this is not an invitation to push harder. Instead, I recommend having the horse evaluated by a vet. It is best to be certain that there are no subtle underlying issues before proceeding with the exercise.

Once my horses are confidently popping over small crossrails at the trot and canter, I then begin to introduce small verticals and oxers. I am careful to provide the horse with a clear ground-line, and to set the horse up for success, allowing them to look at new jumps before asking them to clear them, and being careful not to place jumps in shadowy parts of the arena or somewhere that might distort the horse's ability to clearly gauge the correct take-off point.

I do this over many sessions, spaced out over weeks, rather than days. The beauty of cross-training is that there is no need to rush. Our goal is simply to help our horses move and use their bodies differently from their normal routine. When introducing solid obstacles, like

fallen logs, or other natural obstacles like ditches, I find it is useful to start from the ground up all over again. I longe or lead horses over cross-country obstacles just the same as I would a new obstacle in the ring.

TO RIDE, OR NOT TO RIDE?

It is possible for horses to get all of the cross-training benefits of jumping without ever once being ridden over a jump. Free-jumping or longeing over small fences can easily provide horses with all of the physical and mental enrichment of jumping, the movement variety, and the full-body stretch of a bascule. That said, many people do enjoy riding their horses over fences, and the ability to do so opens up fun competitive opportunities like hunter paces, cross-country jumping, and fox hunting. Vigri and I enjoy competing in hunter paces as a fun and low-pressure supplement to both our distance riding and Icelandic sport competitions.

When I begin to ride a horse over fences, I start all over again with the pole on the ground between the standards, and work my way back up to full-sized jumps. My goal is to build up the horse's confidence, so I reward frequently and increase the difficulty of the exercises in small increments over many short sessions. I never want to put my horse in a position of feeling over-faced. Ideally, if I've done my job, the horse won't ever hesitate or feel the need to refuse. I am careful to use jumps that will fall down if rubbed, to avoid injury.

Keep in mind that jumps do not have to be high in order for horses to gain cross-training benefits from jumping. A 2' oxer provides enough physical challenge for most Icelandic horses to fully bascule over, so there is no need to go much higher than that unless desired. Remember, just because you can go higher doesn't mean your horse will benefit. Conduct a cost/benefit analysis to determine how high you really want to go when it comes to cross-training. A good trainer may also be able to help you determine your horse's conformational suitability for jumping, which may help you determine how much, how often, and how high you wish to jump your horse.

GEAR CHECK

While it is not strictly necessary to purchase a jumping saddle for horses that will be jumping only infrequently, keep in mind that many Icelandic saddles set the rider further back and may make it challenging for the rider to position themselves correctly for jumping. Ad-

ditionally, check that your saddle is not placed too far forward on the horse's shoulders, nor too far back on its loins, so that the horse may bascule without interference.

Never jump in auxiliary reins (such as draw reins or side reins) or in a standing martingale. All of these tools can pose a serious risk should horses fall or become entangled in them while jumping.

Many people choose to shoe their Icelandic horses with a flat, perimeter fit shoe. Some people also like to leave either the front hooves or hind hooves a bit on the long side, believing this to assist with various gait training issues. Renate Weller's research tells us that for each centimeter of growth that takes the hoof past a 50/50 balance at the center of rotation (the widest part of the foot), 50 kilos of strain are added to the suspensory apparatus. Jumping is high impact and requires the horse to land heavily on the forelimbs, and to push off heavily with the hindlimbs. Therefore it is a good idea to keep horses that will be jumping to a tighter trim cycle to avoid excess growth and to keep the hooves to a 50/50 balance. You can find more about this at the following link: https://www.lameness-prevention.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=6601

HIRE A TRAINER

If you are inexperienced with jumping, it is a good idea to hire a qualified trainer to help you teach your Icelandic horse how to jump. A horse that is new to jumping will already feel a bit unbalanced the first few times he jumps with a rider. It is a good idea to have a balanced, experienced rider be the first to ride your horse over fences.

If you're new to jumping, it's an even better idea to take lessons on a seasoned school horse at a jumping barn. That way you can practice on a horse that is fit and knows its job, without the risk of drilling or fatiguing your own horse, or knocking him off balance as you make beginner mistakes. Learn to see your distances, adjust and regulate stride length, and correctly balance and release over a jump before you hop on board your green jumper for cross-training fun.

BE WARY OF GRIDWORK

When I was a competitive jumper, my trainers would frequently have me practice over grids, or combinations—a series of jumps placed with two or fewer strides in between them. The belief at the time was that this would strengthen the horse's hind end.

However, current science tells a different story. We now know that horses do not jump exclusively with their hind

ends, but do actually push off with their forelimbs and use their shoulders to jump, as well. When there are fewer than two strides between fences, horses must use their shoulders inappropriately to get themselves up and over the next fence—and this puts them at risk for shoulder strain. Therefore, grids are something I no longer use in my training, and I have spoken to several trainers who have also stopped using them. All three of my primary jumping mounts from my teen years fell, at various times, during grid exercises, so I am personally relieved to no longer feel pressured to use such exercises.

HAVE FUN!

Many Icelandic horses do make fine jumpers, and can excel in lower level jumping sports like hunter paces, foxhunting, or low level eventing. By proceeding slowly, rewarding often, and raising the criteria of the challenge incrementally, I find that most Icelandic horses will take to jumping rather easily and happily. Even if you never intend to compete or even ride your horse over fences, jumping exercises can be useful tools for cross-training, when added into a groundwork routine. Hopefully this article has provided some helpful food for thought for those curious about jumping their Icelandic horses.



Jumps do not have to be high for horses to gain cross-training benefits. A 2' oxer provides enough physical challenge for most Icelandics. Photo by Em Potts.

MIXED COMPANY TIPS

BY KARA L. NOBLE

Robin Stevens was thrilled when an acquaintance donated a third Icelandic gelding to her therapeutic riding program. Since the new guy was imported from Iceland, she assumed he'd have no trouble fitting into a herd with the two domestic-bred Icelandics she already owned. The three horses quickly proved that you should never make such assumptions.

"We introduced them carefully, but when we put them together my first two beat the crap out of the new guy," says Robin, who is located in Blandford, MA. "We tried for weeks, but it didn't work out. My original two still go out together, but my new gelding gets turned out with a Haflinger. Everybody is happier."

Building a successful herd (whether it is two horses or 20) is equal parts art and science. It requires thoughtful analysis, careful planning, good timing, and a certain amount of luck. Over the years, the challenges involved in crafting the ideal herd spawned many "rules" designed to make the process easier.

Some longstanding herd-forming rules, such as segregating by sex, are practical and effective. According to a 2015 study by Swedish researcher Elke Hartmann, roughly 85% of horse owners who keep herds group their horses by sex, and there are many reasons why that strategy is a good one. Separating stallions and studdish, late-cut geldings from mares avoids unintentional breeding and minimizes aggressive behavior and injuries that occur when males compete for females.



"Are you my type?" Koniak (in blue) asks the Quarter horse. Photo by Micky Bedell.

However, studies in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Germany reveal that same-sex herds are not the best choice for all horses. In non-breeding herds, mares and geldings actually do better when they live together, experiencing less stress and aggression in mixed-sex herds than in single-sex ones.

Grouping horses by age is another common practice. Mares with new foals are routinely (and wisely) isolated from older horses to minimize risks of illness or accidental injury to the babies.

Other common age-based subdivisions have now been determined to be detrimental. Weanlings, yearlings, and two-year-olds have often been kept apart from adult horses. Recent studies have revealed that isolating youngsters inhibits the development of their social and cognitive skills and produces horses with fewer manners and less confidence. In mixed-age, mixed-sex herds, older horses can model appropriate behavior and reinforce social rules. Youngsters reared in such herds are less pushy and easier to train.

BEST PRACTICES

Such contradictions between science and tradition can leave owners scratching their heads over the best way to combine horses into safe, functional herds.

"It's a big topic," said Andrea Barber of Sand Meadow Farm in Mendon, NY. "There are so many variables—the current herd situation, the personalities of the horses, the farm setup." Because no two herd-planning situations are alike, it's crucial to evaluate horses, owner needs and concerns, and farm resources before putting equines together. Careful planning and preparation, along with good advice from an experienced trainer, are key ingredients in effective herd development.

SPACE

According to Sigrún Brynarsdóttir of Solheimar Farm in Tunbridge, VT, adequate space is vital to avoid conflict in a herd. "Horses need personal space," she says. "They need room to eat, rest, and move around without overlapping the personal space of others in their herd."

Andrea notes that having plenty of free space allows a horse to "leave" if tempers flare or a situation becomes stressful. Lots of space reduces the chance that any horse will get cornered in a tense situation.



Koniak (lying down) with his new herd mates, a Morgan and a Quarter horse, in Vermont. "He's spicy, but he's fitting in nicely," says owner Amy Bedell.

Aggression in a herd is most often triggered by competition over resources, so it's vital to have enough room to allow all herd members free access to food, water, and shelter, and to ensure that no horse can block others from reaching those resources.

PERSONALITY

Herds work best when the horses in them have compatible personalities. "Within any breed, you see a lot of different personality types," Sigrún says. "Some horses are playful jokers. Others are calm peacekeepers. Some are bullies, others are mentors. Is a horse social or aloof? Fearful or self-assured? Cranky or easygoing? A control freak? A busybody? Personality is huge in deciding which horses should go together."

Before putting a horse in a herd, spend time observing it. A horse's behavior and body language, the way it interacts with people or responds to stimuli (such as an unexpected noise or the arrival of food) can provide personality clues that will help you recognize which horses are most likely to be content living together and which ones won't enjoy each other's company.

Look for warning signs that a horse might have difficulty in a herd. "Watch out for the horse that doesn't leave you alone, the one that is always picking at you, constantly in your space," says Sigrún. "That's a horse that doesn't know about



Robin Stevens's herd of two Icelandics and a Haflinger (on right); her third Icelandic was being tacked up for a ride.

boundaries. A horse like that will crowd into the space of others and annoy them. That horse will probably have trouble getting along in a herd."

Horses recognize each other's personalities and seek out companions who are like themselves. Calm horses seek the company of horses who know how to chill. Playful horses want to spend time with active playmates. Given enough space, horses often form personality-based subgroups in a herd.

Sometimes circumstances make it impossible to keep a horse in a herd. Stallions are often kept alone. Some horses are too insecure or aggressive to live in a herd, and others are loners who prefer to live alone. If your horse doesn't thrive in a herd or makes it clear that herd life isn't for him, don't force it (or feel guilty about it). For some horses, sharing a fence line with other horses may be the best choice. With proper management, other equines nearby, and lots of human attention, a horse can live very well on its own.

HERD EXPERIENCE

A horse's past herd experience exerts a strong influence on how it will behave in a new herd. Horses who grow up in a herd learn to read body language and respond to social cues. They are taught hierarchies of dominance and submission and know how to find their place within a herd structure.

Horses with extensive experience living in a herd are often baffled—and irritated—by equines who don't know herd communication systems and social conventions.

Sigrún recalls one domestic-bred

Icelandic mare who arrived at her farm with no herd experience. "That mare was clueless," she says. "I don't think she even knew she was a horse. When we put her in a herd, another horse would come over and politely ask her to move. A herd-savvy horse would have moved, but that mare didn't budge. The other horse would bite her to get her to move. She didn't move. The other horse kicked her. She didn't move. The other horse body slammed her. She still didn't move. Finally the other horse looked at me, as if to say, 'Are you joking? What is this?'"

After months of training from her herdmates, the hapless mare eventually mastered enough equine communication and social skills to live with other horses.

"A horse gets shaped by its environment and experience," says Sigrún. "If a horse has herd experience, it is going to integrate more easily than a horse with little or no previous herd experience."

MAKING INTRODUCTIONS

How you introduce horses can have a positive or negative impact on how a herd develops. Horses introduced without first being exposed to one another over fences or across stall walls are more likely to fight than those introduced by living in adjacent paddocks for a few days before sharing a space together.

If a single herd member doesn't take kindly to newcomers, remove that horse and introduce the new one to other, more congenial herd members first. Once most of the herd accepts the new horse, the reluctant one will more likely accept its new companion too.

Sometimes, no amount of finesse will

prevent newly introduced horses from working out their differences in a loud, physical way that's normal for them but nerve-racking for human caretakers.

"It sounds terrible," says Sigrún, "but nobody is getting hurt. They're not kicking or biting. They're just cursing each other out. It's okay to let them figure it out for themselves as long as it's not constant fighting."

What about cases when it is constant fighting?

"When two horses aren't getting along and they aren't working it out, I take them on a very long ride together," said Sigrún. "I pony one and ride the other for about two hours, then switch who is ridden and who is ponied. When we get home, I put them together in a paddock while they are tired. Without fail, they bond."

As Andrea puts it, "Two enemies in a lifeboat often become fast friends."

Consult an experienced trainer for help if you are not confident ponying horses yourself.

WHAT'S THE BEST?

What is the best herd for your Icelandic horse? Like so many questions associated with horses, the most honest answer is "It depends." Each situation is unique and there is no one-size-fits-all living situation that's ideal for every horse and owner. "It's a case-by-case thing," Sigrún says. "You have to observe, make educated guesses. Nobody is psychic. You can't know what will work best until you try things."

In the end, the best herd for any Icelandic horse is one that provides the safest, happiest, healthiest environment for that horse and that gives peace of mind to the people who love and care for it.



Even in an all-Icelandic herd like Alice Ryan's, here, each horse needs its own space.

ICELANDIC ARCHERY

BY JANE WEHRHEIM

Frank Sihler started in archery over 30 years ago. When he and his wife, Claudia, purchased their Icelandic horses a little over five years ago, combining the two sports seemed natural, given the versatility of the breed. So Frank formed Mat-Su Mounted Archers, an affiliated club of the Mounted Archery Association of the Americas.

He started with his own mare, Gjölf, taking three months to desensitize her to the activity. He then tried it with Katla, Claudia's mare, and she took to the sport instantly. Since then, Frank and Katla have competed in national mounted archery competitions in both Arizona and Texas,



Frank Sihler and Katla from Chapman Crest Acres competing in the 2019 Alaska Mounted Archery Competition. All photos by Ed O'Loughlin, Sooner Photography.



placing high in all divisions. His current ranking is Number Four in the nation.

In 2018, Frank hosted the first Mounted Archery competition in his home state of Alaska, with two Icelandics competing out of 12 total horses. In July 2019, he hosted another competition, this time with five Icelandics competing out of eight horses, some carrying multiple riders, as there were a total of 12 riders. The ranking Number One rider in the nation placed first overall on the Icelandic horse known as "TJ." All five Icelandic horses placed high throughout the three-day weekend.

For some of the riders, this was their first exposure to the Icelandic horse. But, as the Mounted Archery Association of the Americas points out on their website, a horse of any breed, if it has the right disposition, can excel at the sport: "A willing and reliable partner makes the best kind of archery horse."

A BETTER RIDER

For Frank, mounted archery furthers his quest to become a better rider. It requires trust as its primary component. The horses are asked to go through the course with little rein contact, most often at a canter. Micromanaging a horse through an archery course cannot happen. Both the



Beverly Heffernan (with her helmet obscured by a fur topper) competed on Jane Wehrheim's Drynur from Pegasus.

rider and the horse must have stock in the game, which greatly improves confidence on both ends.

The rider's self-carriage is crucial for cueing the horse to continue, as the course is not only measured for accuracy on the targets, it is also timed for speed. For the best shots on the target, the rider's legs must absorb most of the movement. There is also a fair amount of muscle memory needed, and one needs to be completely comfortable turning a lot.

A frequent question concerning Icelandic horses and mounted archery is, Can they tölt? Not really. Beginners can do walk or trot—or tölt—while learning the sport, but for competitions, no. These are done in canter or gallop only. The timing for a 90-meter sprint is 9-10 seconds, with the cut-off for gaining or losing points being 14 seconds, so it is definitely a fast-paced sport.

Mounted Archery is not a new sport by any means; it holds a significant place in the histories of many different cultures. Today, it brings people from these and many other cultures together to celebrate, not only the horse, but the trust this amazing creature has in us. Frank has enjoyed traveling around the world to competitions and events, such as in those in Poland in 2018 and Kazakhstan in 2019, and he plans on going to the World Championships in France in 2020.

GETTING STARTED

When Frank does demonstrations at local events, many spectators want to give it a try. So where do you start?

First, check out the website of the Mounted Archery Association of the Americas, at mountedarchery.org. There you can find lists of affiliated clubs and instructors, as well as a calendar of events.

If you can, attend the meeting of a nearby chapter or local event and ask if you can try out someone's bow, or if someone will lend you equipment before you buy anything. The equipment you need to get started is a simple horse bow, which has no shelf rest, allowing the rider to shoot to either the left or right. The draw weight is usually 20-35 pounds—much lighter than the bows used for hunting. Several types of arrows and quivers are used; details can be found on the mountedarchery.org website.

Once you have bought or borrowed a horse bow, start by practicing on the ground, shooting at regular archery targets. This builds the muscle tone and posture you will need before you try shooting from the back of your horse.

After you have learned the specific archery techniques on the ground, desen-



Given that the best archery horse is "a willing and reliable partner," Icelandics can excel at the sport.

sitizing your horse is critical. This can be done as with other sports, by exposing the horse to the actions in a safe and incremental way. The best way is to carefully shoot arrows around your horse, getting it used to the noise when the arrow leaves the bow and hits a target that's only 20 feet away. Once your horse accepts having you shoot repeated arrows while standing right next to it, you can combine the two activities and start shooting from the horse.

Finally, you need to learn the competition rules; these can also be found on the mountedarchery.org website. In general, there are three main courses used in the national ranking:

Korean, with up to three targets evenly spaced on a 90-meter course;

Hungarian, with all three targets in the center of the 90-meter course; and

Polish, which is a one-kilometer cross-country trail done in two to three minutes.

If you have a local club or group that is interested in a demonstration or clinic, call Frank Sihler at 907-841-7468. You can also learn more about the sport of mounted archery on the Facebook pages of Mat-Su Mounted Archers, the Alaska Mounted Archers, the Mounted Archery Association of the Americas, and the International Horseback Archery Alliance.

VOLUNTEERING AT LANDSMÓT

BY KRISTIN MOORHEAD

As a fan of Icelandic horses, going to Landsmót had been on my bucket list, but I never dreamed it would become a reality so soon. In early April 2018, I was poking around on the internet, and I started looking at the Landsmót website. I remembered that it was a year when the National Horse Festival of Iceland would be held (it's coming up again in 2020) and I happened to notice a call for volunteers on the website. "Wow that would be fun," I thought.

I clicked on the link. It said that volunteers had to put in three six-hour shifts during the course of the festival. "I could do that," I thought. Volunteers could camp on the festival grounds for free, get free admission to the week-long festival, and would be provided with meals during their work shifts. "This might just be feasible." I looked up airfares to Iceland and found a round trip fare from Minneapolis to Reykjavík for the first six days of the festival for only \$460. Things were looking more favorable by the minute. My next step was to ask my friend Laura, who is a new fan of Icelandics, if she might like to volunteer with me. "I'm game," she said. Wow! All the stars were aligning.

Laura and I filled out the online application to be volunteers. We contacted Thelma, the volunteer coordinator, and made it clear that we had no command of the Icelandic language and would not be able to do anything that required language skills. Thelma assured us that they would be happy to have two American volunteers working the festival. We were in. The excitement was starting to percolate.



The opening ceremonies at Landsmót 2018 featured over 100 horses and riders carrying flags—both the Icelandic flag, shown here, and the flags of their riding clubs.

THE COLDEST JUNE

June 30 came soon enough, and we flew to Iceland on a short five-hour flight. Upon arriving at the Landsmót grounds, just outside of Reykjavík, we found Thelma and introduced ourselves. She was just like we had imagined: a Nordic beauty with flaxen hair and a near-perfect command of English.

The air was chilly as we set up our tents. Evidently, this was the coldest June that Iceland had had in 100 years. Good thing that we had watched those videos about bringing layers even in the summer. Soon it became apparent that even those layers and our thick Minnesota blood wasn't enough to keep us warm in our tents that first night. We had a very good excuse to buy cozy Icelandic sweaters the next day.

We headed south in our rental car the next day for a day of sightseeing. The sights along the way did not disappoint! There were fields of lupine, glaciers, waterfalls, and black sand beaches with geometric basalt rock formations, not to mention many picturesque vistas dotted with our beloved Icelandic horses. On our way back, we stopped at a municipal geothermal pool so that we could soak in the hot-tubs and store up warmth for our chilly night ahead.

OUR FIRST JOB

In the morning we had our first stint as volunteers. Laura and I met at the volunteer lounge for complimentary coffee and pastries. I had a hafrakakka (oatmeal cookie)—500 calories of buttery goodness (let's keep in mind that I had to stay warm).

In the lounge we met a young woman from the Netherlands, Rikke, who had spent the previous summer as a trainer on an Icelandic horse farm. Rikke was passionate about Icelandic horses, so we had an immediate bond. It was fun to meet people from other parts of the world and find that we had an immediate connection because of a shared love of Icelandics.

Laura and I settled in for our first session from 8:00 to 2:00 at the oval track. We could hardly believe our luck. Our job was to jump up and open the rope gate for the horses and riders as they entered and exited the track. We had front row seats to the A-class horses—the best horses in Iceland. We sat directly in front of the judges and got to watch those amaz-



The hill at Landsmót 2018, filled with Icelandic horse enthusiasts from all over the world.



As Landsmót volunteers, Kristin and Laura had the job of opening and closing the gate to the oval track. “We had front row seats to the best horses in Iceland!”

ing equine athletes perform their gaits. Of course, the flying pace was the most exciting. We were just a few feet away from these beautiful horses as they flew past. Laura was mesmerized, she felt that this was the best sort of baptism by fire into the world of the Icelandic horse.

Mostly, we performed our duties well. I can't say that the entire morning was without incident; we enjoyed ourselves immensely, but we were very insecure at first since we couldn't understand Icelandic and we were not always sure when to open and shut the gates. The judges and even the spectators helped us out if we weren't Johnny-on-the-Spot about getting the gate. Soon we fell into the rhythm and figured out when the gate was to be opened.

One of the most touching moments for me was when they announced the name of one of the horses as “frá Kirkjubæ.” I grabbed Laura's arm, “That's where my mare came from.” My Rækja frá Kirkjubæ (US88200611) was imported from Iceland, and she was the dam of my horse Ragnar from JB (US2006103532), who is the sire of several foals at my farm. This horse entering the track was from the same farm, the same lineage. I actually got a little choked up at the thought of tracing my horses' roots back to the motherland.

After we deduced that it was lunch time (all of the judges left), we headed up to the cafeteria for our complimentary meal. Laura and I ate heartily. This was not the standard festival fare that you would get in the States, no, we had a proper three-course meal. The food was delicious, and it saved us a ton of money, because restaurant food is very expensive in Iceland.

OTHER FANS

Our second volunteer assignment, on the following day, was in the cafeteria. It wasn't as glamorous as working at the oval track, but it was a great opportunity to meet other Icelandic horse fans. Jóhanna, an Icelandic horse trainer, was also on cafeteria duty with us. She invited us to come and ride with her at her home. Unfortunately, our schedule didn't allow for that, so it will have to wait for our next trip to Iceland.

Between clearing away plates and tidying the dining hall, we watched the competition on the large screens and chatted with people. We met the president of the Norwegian Icelandic Horse Federation, and also the owner of an Icelandic trekking company. The cafeteria was a veritable Who's Who of the Icelandic world.

Later that evening we joined Jóhanna and her friends in her camper for a drink, and then we headed to one of the event tents for raucous live music. It was great to feel part of the in-crowd and to hang out with other volunteers and competitors. We never would have gone to the after-parties if we had come to Landsmót as spectators. There were also a lot of seminars and training sessions offered during the day, so when we had down time, we took advantage of these offerings.

BREATHTAKING

Our third volunteer experience was once again on the oval track, but this session consisted of youth riders. We were old hands at it by this time and knew exactly when to open and shut the gate. This was a great chance to really relax and enjoy

watching the horses and riders. Our afternoon was free that day, so we also managed to fit in a trail ride. Thelma gave us a recommendation for an outfitter nearby, and we had a great ride with some beautiful scenery.

The culminating event for us at Landsmót was the opening ceremony on Thursday night. We sat under a new Icelandic blanket and watched as over a hundred Icelandic horses came tölting onto the track. Horse clubs from all over Iceland rode in with their club flags waving above them. It was a breathtaking experience.

The final two days of the festival drew the biggest crowds. Unfortunately, our flight was on Friday, so we missed the finale. Thelma and Jóhanna both thought that we were crazy to leave early, but I can say that we had a full week of great experiences nonetheless.

IF YOU GO

The next Landsmót will be held in 2020 in Hella, in the South of Iceland. Start looking at the Landsmót website—Landsmot.is—in the spring of 2020 so that you can register to volunteer by the deadline of April 10. Plan on staying through the last weekend of Landsmót, that's when the crowds are the biggest.

If you're not the camping type, you can still volunteer. Just secure your own lodging for the week. Even if the calendar says summer, pack your winter woolens. Bring sturdy rain gear, as the activities go on rain or shine. And bring a sleep mask. Remember, it is the Land of the Midnight Sun, and it never really gets dark. Especially in a tent.

AGING HORSES, AGING HUMANS

BY LISA MCKEEN

I'm 64. My health is good, I've healed well from my last horse accident—but I've changed. I've lost some of my cow-girl swagger. I have an ominous and growing awareness that I don't have the balance or muscle tone I had in my 50s. Over the years I've sustained concussions—who knows how many, or what level of residual damage there may be. I love my horses, and riding brings me joy and emotional stability. It always has. But I'm also aware that my time is shortening, and I want to spend as much of it as I can with my family, both two-legged and four-legged. So I'm learning about aging and how to protect myself.

My mares are both 11 this year, as is the gelding. We have been together since they were 6. I've suddenly realized that these may well be my last horses. The thought is shocking and terrifying. I don't think I have the skill to start a green horse anymore—that has never been an issue for me before. Many things play into my thinking. I can't imagine anyone else caring for my horses like I do. I don't want to die and leave their care to chance. We are friends, so I want their days to be happy and healthy. If I can, I will ride them until they let me know they are ready to retire. Then they will have a life of leisure until the end. I'm hoping they will make it to 30, and by then I'll be 83. That's probably a good time to stop climbing on top of a horse. If I need to train more, I'll consider doing only ground work. (I have hedged a bit by also having a driving horse and a cart.)

EASING INTO IT

There is plenty of information about aging horses and aging humans on the internet. This article is meant to raise some questions that all of us will face at some point and to ease us into a supportive dialogue. We and our horses benefit from having a community—our Icelandic horse clubs—to help us transition through the stages of our lives. What a gift to the young people among us, too, to have elders that talk about, teach, and learn together.

With that in mind, I sent out a set of interview questions. The results were interesting. Many of my horse friends chose not to engage. That in itself is information; not everyone is ready or willing to think about end-of-life plans. It all seems very far away and nebulous—until it's not. Though



Lisa now—on her own farm, with a very relaxed Elsa from Extreme Farm, enjoying a fun lesson from trainer Freya Sturm. “Notice, even on my own place, I’m wearing full safety gear these days!” Photo by Kathryn Lockerbie.

I would by no means say my survey is scientific, it did reassure me that many others do think about these things and that there is wisdom to be gleaned. Some folks opted to be anonymous, others were okay with sharing their names. Some focused on the horses and some on themselves.

WHAT'S CHANGED?

My first two questions were, How long have you owned your current horses? and, How have those horses changed over the course of time?

I loved what Christine Schwartz said because it resonated with me as well. Christine has owned and ridden Icelandics since 1976 (I got mine in 2001). “My personal horses, as they grew in age,” she said, “formed a deeper connection with me. I trusted them more with different riders, especially children. My first horse, Valur, was

quite a runaway when he first came from Iceland, but he was also a fantastic jumper: He jumped over 4 feet. I rarely let anybody else ride him until his mid-twenties, when he became a great kids' horse.”

Sharon Hoofnagle, now in her 70s, was an equine veterinarian for 37 years. Of the two horses she has owned for 10 and 14 years, she said, “We have developed closer bonds. They can predict what I want to do on a ride before I know what I want to do. Any drama is gone. But I no longer go on long aggressive rides, like packing into the high country 20 miles. We are all slowing down a bit. We could ride harder, but I would worry about them.”

Like Christine and Sharon, some folks were able to say they had owned the same horses from their early years. I was looking especially for people like that, so they could talk about the changes. Horses,

like their humans, can develop injuries or arthritis, become insulin resistant, or have other ailments. So while the initial cost of vetting is low on young Icelandics, it does seem that vet costs rise with your horse's age. Likewise, humans spend more time healing from injuries as they age and, therefore, spend more time off their horses than they might have earlier on. I think the big message is that we, both horses and humans, become more vulnerable as we age.

This requires us to be flexible in our thinking and planning about horse care and riding. What used to be a weekly routine of trail riding, track riding, and more trail riding may become more like this: a trail ride, Intrinzen or other groundwork, an arena ride, more groundwork, and then two days off if my back is sore or one of the horses seems tired. It requires flexible thinking, which keeps your brain young. We seek novelty to keep the horses interested in our work together. We also have to get better at using feeds, herbs, and other supplements to alleviate or avoid nutritional deficits that allow the body to break down sooner.

Learning from our maturing horses can help us learn about and respect our own body's needs as we age, as well. Supplements may be helpful for us, too, as are learning different ways of lifting, and varying our types of activities. Our tenderness and gentle care for our horses' bodies can help us develop the skill to care for our own physical needs. Horses have taught me much and it seems that they will continue to do so.

A LIFE OF HORSES

I also asked, When did you begin riding or working with horses?, and How have you changed over the years? For most people, the connection with horses showed up early; I know I was born with mine. As a child I had imaginary horses, instead of the imaginary friends many young children have. I continue to be in awe of the 70- and 80-year-olds who come to me for a horse experience. Curiosity about horses and desire for that connection never seems to go away.

Those of us who have lived long with horses have changed much over the years. We are less willing to take risks, but more willing to try new things like liberty training, scent training, or dressage. The learning, as we work to communicate with our horses, is exponential and, while many horse owners are quick to recognize the changes in their horses, we also learn to attend to the changes time requires for our own lives. As a group, we have certainly noticed our energy has decreased and our



Lisa then—with a very anxious-looking green Appaloosa named Satin. “No helmet, no vest, but lots of injuries to tell stories about!”

old injuries come back to haunt us. But we have also received the gift of patience and a willingness to listen to what our horses and our own bodies tell us. We are more likely to seek out new ways of doing things.

I wouldn't be riding today if it weren't for my mentors and coaches. After some severe injuries, my lower back never healed. To address the pain I had back surgery, but because of conversations with my horse community, including Alys Culhane, Freya Sturm, Kathy Lockerbie, and Wendy Murdoch, I learned to approach my healing more slowly (never my way in this world; I'm a get up and get it done kind of spirit), to listen to my pain, and to re-train my brain to manage movement. Through the science underpinning Intrinzen and Project Proprius, I understand now that there is gain without pain! What a concept! Thank you, Steinar Sigurbjörnsson and Kathy

Sierra, for developing those programs. My horses are happier and healthier, as am I. However, I'm sure that I wouldn't have been as open to these new ideas if my circumstances hadn't insisted that I learn to do things differently.

MAKING CHOICES

The hours of your life fly quickly by and, as we age, we are forced to make decisions about how to spend our energy each day. Taking time to notice how things are changing is a great gift of aging. Another difference is that I can no longer work for 10 or 12 hours without a break. So, rather than boating with my husband, I may choose riding on a particular day. Instead of riding, I may choose to hang out with my grandkids. Limited energy means making choices. Rather than brushing off signals that something is off, I now attend to the

subtle warnings my body sends me. Likewise, I am better able to sense my horse's needs. As I take the time to feel their bodies while grooming or before saddling, I benefit from that connection with them and the time we spend breathing together. They are full of energy now, but as they age I'll need to continue educating myself and observe them carefully for signs of pain or fatigue.

As Glenda Josey said, "I think the best thing I have learned from this whole horse experience is you need to listen to your animal. I cringe when I hear people say, 'My horse is stubborn. He won't do what I want him to do.' Usually your animal is trying to tell you something and you are just too stubborn and inflexible to listen. There are very few horses that are born crazy. It is people that make them so."

Said Judy Skogen, "I am 67 now, and my body is beginning to have difficulty taking care of all my responsibilities as a horse owner. During the winter I care for four horses, two of which are elderly 'big' horses and two Icelandics, who are easy maintenance. But I realize that I really can't care for that many horses or I soon will be too worn out to care for any. During the summer months the chores are manageable and enjoyable, but I still realize that so many other household chores are getting neglected."



Lisa gives Brynn Alpar, riding Lisa's mare Sali, a lesson through a simple obstacle course. "As the mares have become solid mounts, they have partnered with me in passing on basic horse knowledge." Photo by Shauna Alpar.

Lisa Roland added, "I notice I am by far not as committed to continue riding as I used to be. I am keeping the horses I have through their retirement, with the possibility of selling my youngster. My husband and I have hobbies that we want to explore further, including travel. I will continue certifying my animals for search and rescue and enjoy trail rides with friends, but competition has taken a back burner."

LOOKING FORWARD

At what age do you expect to stop riding? Each of us and each of our horses are individuals, so there is no specific age that dictates when we will stop. Most of the respondents plan to ride and keep horses as long as they can. Their bodies—and their horses—will let them know. I know myself well: I'm the one who has ignored doctors, caring family members, and any others when it comes to riding or working with horses. I will continue to disregard all advice to stop, so I'm trying hard to hone my listening skills. I seek conversations with people who can support me in my decision-making. In some ways, I have already begun the journey.

Said RJ West, "I'm probably in denial, but I hope to ride as long as I can get my leg over a horse. Older friends have ridden until their late 70s, but I have one friend who is riding in her mid-80s. I expect I'll be in the former group."



"Driving Elska is an alternative activity for the times I feel too sore to ride," Lisa says. Elska also enjoys the change in the routine.

Dawn Shaw will stop "when I can no longer physically do it. I've already quit training," she said, "except for my own. I'll start my own young horses, but I have less tolerance for 'snags.' If there's something I don't want to deal with, I'm happier paying someone else who I trust to do the work. I no longer ride green horses. Instead, I plan to keep the two mares I have now until they have passed. I know if I change my mind, I have great trainers who can help me find a horse that will partner well with me. This requires me to quiet the hardcore cowgirl in me and consider what others are telling me. If my death precedes those of my horses, I have a plan for their care. My family knows who to call. I found people I can trust through the USIHC's regional clubs."

Sharon Hoofnagle, too, said she had "a directive in my will that states what I would like done with my animals if I precede them in death or cannot make decisions. There is also a fund set aside for them. Also—and this is a hard one—I have given permission for euthanasia by a vet if the vet and caretakers all agree. I feel an old horse with serious health problems might prefer to leave this earth. My family know and love my animals. I trust them to make the right decision."

There's no great time to plan for our own death or those of our horses. Now is the time to think about how you will know when the time has come to make changes in your routines. What resources do you have to help you extend your time with horses? I think the wisest thing we can all do is talk to people who are supportive and who will encourage us to maintain our own flexible mindset. After all, any day that you can spend time with a horse is a great day!

CENTERED HORSE PACKING

BY ALYS CULHANE

Last summer, Pete and I set off on a three-month horse trip in the Lower 48. Our primary reason for going so far afield from our home trails of Alaska was to expose our two younger mares (Hrimfara, 6, and Tyra, 5) to unfamiliar four-leggeds, thus making them more reliable trail horses. We also enlisted the services of Raudhetta (16), who by virtue of having done two previous trips, had (at least in her own mind) seen and done it all.

I wanted to put my knowledge of the Four Centered Riding Basics—centering, soft eyes, breathing, and alignment—to practice in unfamiliar settings. This was a tall order, given that most Centered Riding instruction is arena-based. It's one thing to put theory to practice on familiar trails; it's quite another to do this on unfamiliar trails. But having tangible results would further bolster my confidence and competence.

We ended up interspersing day trips with longer pack trips, since the snow in the high country was too deep for extended packing. This was advantageous in that Tyra and Hrimmi's trail education included much-needed mental and physical breaks.

COWS

Our first livestock interaction occurred early in our trip. We were doing a day ride in Medicine Bow National Forest, near our friends CJ and Dave DiPietra's Wyoming residence and saddle-making



Tyra, loaded for the trail, at the hitching post on the Lander Cut-Off trailhead.

shop. I rode Tyra, Pete rode Raudi and ponied Hrimmi, and CJ accompanied us on Happy Jack. CJ's Arab is cow-competent, by virtue of there being more cows than horses in Wyoming.

The landscape consists of forested and sage brush country. I breathed a sigh of relief upon seeing that the trails were well maintained. My sense of relief was short-lived. Two miles out, Pete uttered the C-word: "Cows. You hear them?" he asked. I didn't hear anything.

"They're just over the rise," CJ said. I then heard the signature sound of bovines—muffled hooves and mournful blowing.

"Sounds like a cattle drive," Pete said.

"They're directly in front of us!" I screeched.

Tyra raised her head and snorted. This was déjà vu all over again. I remembered the time Pete and I were sea kayaking in Alaska's Southeast Passage. I glanced to my left and saw a cruise ship coming. We were at the apex of a waterway Y. There was a 50-percent chance we'd become killer whale fodder. "Go left," Pete said. As luck would have it, this was the correct choice then, and it was the correct choice now.

We halted our horses 100-yards distant, turned around, and watched them come over the rise. A half-dozen cowboys rode to the side of and behind the lengthy bovine line, and four border collies pressed the line forward. The cows passed by where we'd first heard them, and kept going. We resumed our ride.

Lessons Learned: If I'd been graded on my use of the four basics, I would have failed. In that moment of duress, I hadn't brought my Centered Riding training to mind, so my sympathetic nervous system (flight or fight) went into overdrive. Centering? Fearing our horses were going to bolt, my "center" rose to somewhere near my throat. Soft eyes? My face muscles were hard, my gaze locked on Hrimmi's brown-and-white butt. Alignment? I remained crouched over the entire time. Breathing? I sucked in air, but did not release it. Had Tyra not zoned in on Raudi, I am sure she would have drawn upon my fears and bolted. I could do better.



Pete, riding Raudi and ponying the pack horse, Hrimmi, above Blacktail Creek in the Scapegoat Wilderness.



Alys in Idaho, trekking along the Selway River.

MORE COWS

On our first pack trip, we took five days to ride from a BLM campground located outside of Encampment, WY to Commissary Park, CO, and back to the campground. As we turned onto the trail the first morning, we found a cattle guard at its base. These guards, designed to keep bovines in, have side-access gates to allow trail users and stock owners to enter and exit the grazing lands. I dismounted Tyra and opened the gate. Cows would be everywhere, I worried, given the evidence of cow plops on and beside the trail. Sure enough we soon sighted a herd of 50-plus Angus scattered across the landscape.

The cows paid us little mind, and moved off the trail when we approached. This scene repeated itself several times during the course of the day. My confidence was such that I began singing “Get Along Little Doggie,” as the young ones, tails high in the air, followed their disgruntled mothers.

Near day’s end, however, it was raining and snowing. The horses were hungry. Grass was sparse because the land was overgrazed. I, in the lead, heard blowing and then saw a particular group of very large bovines—I likened them to fourth-grade lunchroom bullies. They had thick necks, snotty noses, and irritated expressions. No, they weren’t going to yield to us. I again began singing, this time “Don’t Fence Me In,” and kept going toward them. Pete on Raudi followed. The cows, as if by magic, moved aside. I then noticed, off to the side, a large black bull with a white question mark on his fore-

head. He strode in my direction, stopped by the trail edge and bellowed loudly. We all kept going.

Lessons Learned: Yes, this time I drew upon my Centered Riding training. Key here was alignment. When I saw the cows, I brought to mind an image of the Marlboro Man, an individual who (before coming down with lung cancer) embodied fearlessness. My picturing him enabled me to sit up tall and to align my shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles. This postural shift conveyed to Tyra that, yes, I was in charge, and no, we had nothing to worry about. This, then, was the message that we also conveyed to Mr. Bull.



Hrimmi with her pack saddle, ready to load. Notice she’s also wearing boots.

RANGE HORSES

Pete and I pored over maps with a U.S. Forest Service ranger prior to doing our second pack trip. The Big Piney is part of the Bridger-Teton National Forest, and the ranger for that district expressed his reservations about our proposed route, noting that the USFS trail crews had not yet removed all the deadfall. I unfolded an area map of the Lander Cutoff Trail, a historic route originally traversed by those on the Oregon Trail. He said that some parts weren’t well maintained, but that there were trail markers. Pete and I decided we’d do an eight-day loop, starting and finishing near Big Piney. This would enable us to ride portions of the historic trail.

We soon discovered the trails on our route had not been well maintained. Signage in key places was non-existent. The trip was a lesson in frustration. But it was gratifying, too, in that we rose to the challenge of locating trails with no GPS and only USFS maps in hand. It was also one of the most scenic portions of our trip: We rode through several fields of yellow daisies.

On Day Eight, we had what I later called a wrong side of the fence occurrence. We’d spent the afternoon on the Salt River Trail and had planned on camping in that area, but could not find a suitable campsite: one with water, trees for highlining, and grass. We continued on, turning toward Water Canyon, which might have what we needed for camping.

The adage “the grass is always greener on the other side,” is why livestock can often be found on the wrong side of

fences. Suddenly, two large, rangy chestnut horses came trotting up the road. Tyra lowered her head and began grazing. Raudi raised her head high, turned on her haunches, and bolted in the direction we'd just come. Tyra heard Raudi coming and took off too. We were coming up on a dirt road with ATV traffic, so I was ponying Ryder, our border collie. "The dog, the dog!" I yelled. Her rope was on my right wrist. I tried, but couldn't shake it off. Tyra slowed to a fast walk—it was then that I looked behind me. Pete, who'd tumbled off Raudi, was now standing beside her. He later told me that Hrimmi was on his right when Raudi took off. He held the reins in his left hand and Hrimmi's lead in his right. The lead rope crossed his face and pulled him off balance.

The range horses had lost interest in following us and were now grazing. Our horses did the same. As we were putting Tyra's and Raudi's Easy Boots back in place, I noticed that there was a herd of five more horses to the right of the other two. We crossed the road and walked our animals up and over the nearest hill, and in this way removed ourselves from the eight horses' line of sight.

Lessons Learned: My fait accompli was that I stayed in the saddle when Tyra galloped off. Rather than holding my breath, I synchronized my breathing with hers. I'd often practiced this at home, but I had never before done it on unfamiliar trails. By dint of habit, it came to me naturally.

MULES GALORE

Our final pack trip took place in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, northwest of Helena, MT. We'd heard this area was a trail rider's paradise because the trails are well-made, well-marked with proper signage, and off-limits to motorized vehicles.

But we would be riding there in early August, when outfitters are taking supplies into remote hunting camps. Their pack strings consist of many mules carrying huge, bulky loads, giving them a camel-like appearance. Trail etiquette dictates that those with smaller strings yield to those with larger strings.

Raudi was familiar with mules. Her trail buddy in the 2018 Knik River Ramble competitive trail ride was a mule. Tyra and Hrimmi, however, had never crossed paths with their long-eared counterparts. Hrimmi was our lone pack horse, so we'd have to step off the trail if an outfitter was leading two more animals.

In our travels in Wyoming we'd ridden across scree-covered embankments, some with narrow ledges and steep drop-offs. I'd been told The Bob had sections



Pete and Alys met outfitter Neil Eustace on the trail, also packing with Icelandics in the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

like this. I couldn't help but wonder—what if we were riding along one of these ledges and a pack string came our way? An Icelandic has an incredibly tight turning radius; still, it would not be possible. I pictured the scree avalanching, and all of us tumbling off a cliff.

Our first encounter with mules occurred shortly after we arrived at the Indian Meadows Trailhead. I let the horses off their highline to graze in a nearby grassy area. Fifteen minutes later, an outfitter and his mule train came down the nearby trail. Even with her hobbles, when Raudi saw the seven loaded mules, she hopped in their direction. Tyra and Hrimmi followed. I envisioned our horses mixing it up with the mules, who, in having the ability to kick sideways, had the home court advantage. The outfitter stopped his string and waited patiently for me to put the lead rope on Raudi. Pete, right behind me, put leads on Tyra and Hrimmi. The outfitter and his very well-behaved stock continued on their way. We learned from this incident to always have our horses restrained when in this area.

Our subsequent mule encounters

were all equally uneventful. We did have to pull off the trail from time to time. But, aside from an occasional ear-shattering bray, the mules were well behaved. Our horses paid them little mind.

Lessons Learned: In all our mule encounters, I put my Centered Riding training to use. Soft eyes: When I saw Raudi take off, I made my eyes go soft, enhancing my peripheral vision. I saw where I needed to position myself to get between her and the mules. My relaxed gaze also communicated to Raudi that coming over to me was an acceptable option. Centering: Out on the trail, I often thought of my having a ball of light in my core. This ball got smaller when I wanted Tyra to expend energy and move out, and larger when I wanted her to relax. And relax she did when mules walked by.

Throughout the summer, my drawing upon Centered Riding's Four Basics made for very enjoyable riding. In adhering to the basics, I learned to better deal with fear, for I found myself more in the moment than I would have been otherwise.



The Forest Service warned some of the wilderness trails were not well-maintained. They meant it.

MOON BLINDNESS STUDY

BY MICHALA DE LINDE HENRIKSEN AND ANN DWYER

Moon Blindness, or equine recurrent uveitis (ERU), is a painful eye disease in horses. Caused by an autoimmune process, it can result in severe damage, including corneal ulcerations, glaucoma, cataracts, retinal detachment, and, ultimately, blindness. Appaloosas have a high genetic risk for the syndrome, calculated at 8.3 times greater than other breeds. ERU has also been linked to genetic factors in Warmblood horses.

The Icelandic horse has not been implicated as a high-risk breed, but medical records from Denmark show that they are often referred for signs of ERU. Michala de Linde Henriksen, an assistant professor at Colorado State University and a board-certified veterinary ophthalmologist, and Tina Pihl, an associate professor and large animal internist at the University of Copenhagen, are leading a research team looking for underlying causes that may predispose the Icelandic horse to develop the disease. Rebecca Bellone, head of the Genetics Laboratory at the University of California at Davis, is conducting genetic analyses on horses that enter the study. Ann Dwyer, an equine practitioner from the Genesee Valley Equine Clinic in New York with broad experience in ophthalmic examination and research in ERU, is examining some of the horses studied in the U.S.

ERU is known to be triggered by the bacteria *Leptospira*. (Other infectious agents, such as the parasitic worm *Onchocerca*, can also cause blindness, but not the lifelong autoimmune disease we see in ERU.) In Denmark, where the research team examined 112 Icelandic horses, the preliminary results suggest that *Leptospira* bacteria are not involved in the disease process for ERU in the Icelandic horse. The team hypothesizes that a genetic component may play a role in cases of ERU in Icelandic horses, though they are still looking to see if leptospirosis is a factor in any ERU cases found outside of Denmark. The team is applying for grants to also examine horses in Iceland.

In the U.S., the researchers are currently enrolling Icelandic horses in New York and Colorado; other sites may be added. They are not looking for single



horses with known eye problems, but for owners or breeders with multiple Icelandic horses who are interested in being a part of a larger research study. They have already examined 18 horses, for example, owned by members of the Saint Skutla Icelandic Horse Club at Steven and Andrea Barber's Sand Meadow Farm in Mendon, NY.

Each horse in the study undergoes a thorough ocular exam, and samples of hair and blood are taken for DNA analysis and leptospiral serology. The examination inspects all layers of the eye, including the cornea, iris, lens, and retina. Simple stain tests are performed to check for corneal disease, and intraocular pressure readings are taken to check for glaucoma. Photographs record the coat color of the horse and document both normal and abnormal eye findings. The process takes 30-45 minutes per horse. The horses are usually lightly sedated, and short term nerve blocks are performed to quiet eyelid movement, optimize image quality, and obtain accurate eye pressure readings. The exams are usually well tolerated by the horses. Results of normal and abnormal findings are shared with the owners, and there is no cost to participate in the study.

Knowledge of the prevalence of ERU in Icelandics and the potential underlying causes will benefit equine veterinarians and Icelandic horse owners globally. If genetic

factors are found, then prevention of this devastating disease can be pursued through genetic testing and selective breeding. Icelandic horse owners and equine practitioners will be able to better monitor horses for early diagnosis of ERU and provide treatment to prolong the comfort and vision of affected horses.

For more information, or for owners or breeders with multiple Icelandic horses to offer your horses for the study, please contact the lead researcher at michala.henriksen@colostate.edu.

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A photograph of a rider on an Icelandic horse, with several orange circles highlighting specific pieces of riding equipment: the helmet, the horse's bridle, the rider's gloves, the saddle, the rider's boots, and the horse's shoes.

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- used riding gloves or riding shoes

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F.: IS2007187661 **Strokkur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum**
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US2017205263

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