

Issue Three

THE

2020

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.



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 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 practical 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

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THE ICELANDIC HORSE QUARTERLY

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The Icelandic Horse Quarterly is published in March, June, September, and December by the USIHC as a benefit of membership. Renew online at www.icelandics.org.

Deadlines are January 1 (for the March issue), April 1, July 1, and October 1. We reserve the right to edit submissions. All articles represent the opinions of their authors alone; publication in the *Quarterly* does not imply an endorsement of any kind by the USIHC. Ads are accepted with the understanding that the advertiser is authorized to publish their contents and agrees to indemnify the USIHC and the *Quarterly* against any loss or expense resulting from their publication. The USIHC reserves the right to reject any ad.

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On the cover: Our horses help us find peace and calm in these trying times. Here, Doug Drake and Assa from Slet-tunni (US2007203745) cool off at Lake Riverside Estates, Aguanga, California. Photo by Sabrina Drake.

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Previous Page: Who would not love to join this happy group of riders at a magnificent beach on the Oregon coast? Samantha Harrigan rode her new horse Ari from Amore Icelandic Horse Farm, and her big smile says it all! Photo by Laura Harrigan.

VIRTUAL SHOWS

From April 15 to June 30, the USIHC Sport Committee held the first ever USIHC Virtual Show. The show included both National Ranking (sanctioned show) classes and Schooling Show classes. Emily Potts developed an online portal where riders could upload videos of their tests and pay their entry fees electronically. Will and Ásta Covert handled the IceTest software. The videos were judged by FEIF international Sport Judge Þorgeir Guðlaugsson.

For each class, riders submitted a video in this format: The videographer stood in the center of the riding area and continuously recorded the performance from the time the horse entered the track to when it left. No edits were allowed. The horse and rider were to remain in the center of the frame, with no zooming in or out. The video included no music or commentary. For complete entry rules and descriptions of the classes, see <https://icelandics.org/virtualshow/>.

The USIHC Summer Virtual Show was a great success. Over 90 videos were entered in the National Ranking Show and over 20 in the Schooling Show, representing about 70 horse-rider combinations. (By comparison, the 2019 NEIHC Open had about 127 combinations.) The largest class was Novice Tölt (T7).

The highest scores were earned by Coralie Denmeade (T1: 6.50), Lori Cretney (T5: 6.30), Ayla Green (F1: 6.30), Virginia Lauridsen (V1: 6.20), Abbi Brock (V5: 6.10), Heidi Benson (F2: 6.00), Lori



In Wisconsin, Lori Cretney and Baldursbrá from Winterhorse took first in both T5 and V3 at the Virtual Show. Baldursbrá also won the 2019 Cantella Breeding Award. Photo by Shaila Ann Sigsgaard.



Amelie Maranda of Vermont and Freyr frá Kverk were one of 70 horse-rider pairs who competed in the first USIHC Virtual Show. Amelie placed first in V6 and second in T7 and V5. Photo by Debra Benanti.

Cretney (V3: 6.00), Nicole Kempf (TGH: 6.00), Deb Kenny (PT: 6.00), and Jeff Rose (T3: 6.00). Complete show results are at icelandics.org/sanctioned-show-results.

Watch the Events Calendar at icelandics.org for news of the Second USIHC Virtual Show.

NATIONAL RANKING SUSPENDED

As the restrictions due to Covid-19 affect the organization of USIHC-sanctioned shows, it is not possible to guarantee equal conditions for national ranking events in various states. Therefore, the USIHC board voted in May to suspend the National Ranking program and to not accept any national ranking results—other than those obtained through the USIHC Virtual Shows—until further notice.

USIHC PARTNERS

In April, the USIHC board announced a new membership benefit with Scoot Boot: All USIHC members will receive a 10% discount on any Scoot Boot purchase.

According to the news release, Scoot Boot is “the latest innovation in hoof boot technology. Scoot Boot offers protective equine hoof boots available in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. Constructed of strong thermo plastic urethane (TPU), as well as securing straps, Scoot Boots have superb strength to stand up to all types of terrain that you and your horse may ride over.”

A new page on the USIHC website (icelandics.org/partners) provides information on how to order and how USIHC

members can receive the discount. Watch the page for additional offers, as discussion with several other possible USIHC partner companies are ongoing.

YOUTH VIDEO CONTEST

FEIF has invited the USIHC and other member countries' organizations to participate in a youth video competition. The idea of the program is for youth members in different countries to compose and submit a three- to five-minute video on the theme of “The Dream of...” The Youth Committee is coordinating the USIHC's response. For more information, contact Lucy Nold at youth@icelandics.org.

BREEDING MANUAL

A first draft of the USIHC Breeding Manual is nearing completion, the Breeding Committee reported in May. Contributors



From California, Ayla Green and Móri frá Kolgerði (right) and Heidi Benson and Strokur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum won the F1 and F2 classes at the Virtual Show. Photo by Eleanor Anderson.

include Heimir Gunnarsson, Martina Gates, Suzy Oliver, Virginia Lauridsen, and others. Plans are to release the manual in early 2021.

BREEDING AWARD

The Breeding Committee has announced that the 2019 Cantella Award for the highest assessed domestic-bred mare goes to Baldursbrá from Winterhorse Park (US2010204419), bred by Barb and Dan Riva and owned by Lori Cretney. Baldursbrá scored 8.06 for conformation and 7.67 for

ridden abilities, for a total score of 7.83.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all 2020 breeding evaluations have been cancelled.

RIDING BADGE PROGRAM

Congratulations to Cirrus Bunn from Alaska, who received her Basic Level 2 Riding Badge in April. Janet Mulder was the instructor, and Bernie Willis was the examiner. That makes a total of 16 Riding Badge Certificates awarded so far in 2020.

Since there is currently no manual for the Riding Badge Pleasure Riding Levels 1 & 2, the Education Committee has proposed sharing the exam answer sheet with the instructors. The USIHC board approved the idea in April, and Janet Mulder has volunteered to type up an older manual from the early days of the program for the committee to work off of.

TRAINER CERTIFICATION

Progress is being made on the USIHC's Level 1 Instructor/Trainer Certification program. Virginia Lauridsen is coordinating a group of sub-committees to create the content. With the board's approval, the sub-committees consist of the following volunteers: 1) Content: Carrie Brandt, Caeli Cavanagh, Jana Meyer, Alex Pregitzer, Coralie Denmeade, and Laura Benson; 2) Editing: Kari Pietsch-Wangard and Virginia Lauridsen; 3) Consultants: Will Covert, Eyjólfur Ísólsson, Silke Feuchthofen, Nicole Kempf, and Mette Manseth.



Coralie Denmeade of Colorado and Salka frá Frostastöðum won first place in T1 at the Virtual Show. Photo by Pam Spooner.



Virginia Lauridsen of Iowa and Gosi frá Lambastöðum took first place in V1 at the USIHC Virtual Show.

CLUB BANNERS

The Promotion Committee, led by Emily Potts, has developed a program for Regional Clubs to create a joint banner with the USIHC; Sherry Hoover has volunteered to help club representatives design their banners. All Regional Clubs are eligible for a banner and are encouraged to take advantage of the USIHC funding set aside for this program; attending an expo is not a requirement for ordering a club banner. So far, Sirius and Hestafolk banners have been completed; Cascade, Klettajfalla, and CIA have requested them. To request a banner, go to <https://forms.gle/xftGYzruoDMWAmk6>.

LEISURE RIDING

The Sea2Shining Sea (S2SS) Riders of the Month for this quarter are Ellen Lichtenstein and Kristina Behringer.

Ellen Lichtenstein lives in Arvada, CO, where she keeps three Icelandic horses: Snuggur from Windstar, Keilir from Klakahross, and Tilraun frá Þúlu, along with an old Quarter Horse. Why did she join the S2SS Virtual Ride? "My husband and I seem to always be riding, so when I was invited to join a team with some Rocky Mountain region friends, of course I thought it was a good idea. 2020 is the first year I've tracked every hour of riding, so I'm curious to see how many hours/miles

I do in a year. It would be really cool to reach 1,000."

Ellen hasn't always loved trail riding. "When I was younger, I had a lot of treacherous rides and a few bad injuries on the trails. I started rediscovering trail riding around 2015, when I got my first trailer. The freedom I felt was amazing. Now trail riding is one of my favorite things to do, because I can see things I wouldn't be able to on foot."

Ellen, like many people, "lucked into" Icelandics. "I was visiting Norway in 2012 and booked a winter trail ride in Lillehammer. I didn't know I was going to an Icelandic horse farm, but in my two-hour ride I fell in love and decided the next horse I bought would be an Icelandic. It took me five years to get one, but now, three years later, I have three."

Kristina Behringer owns the Icelandic horse farm Gyetorp II in Cheyenne, WY. "I don't think I'll list every horse I own, because some are personal horses and some are horses we have here for sale. Each one is special and has lovely characteristics and personality." The S2SS Virtual Ride, she says, "is a fun way to 'ride together' with my team, especially right now. I really enjoy seeing everyone else's pictures of their rides, and really appreciate their sweet or funny comments."

Riding, for her, is a way of "finding

that balance with everything else I have going on in the world. I'm also drawn to learning opportunities, both to participate in and to make available to others." Mostly she rides close to home or in an arena, not out on the trail. "Being with horses is special, and finding those moments of harmony and true partnership is very rewarding."

UNREGISTERED HORSES DISCUSSED

As detailed in the May 12 board meeting minutes, USIHC member Josh Bart proposed the establishment of an "Un-Verified Pedigree (UVP) Listing" for horses "that are clearly Icelandic (with no known or obvious cross-breeding; or for horses that are pending pedigree and genetic verification; and for horses with unknown pedigree) for the purpose of inclusion into competitions and/or for eventually transferring from UVP Listing to the verified Registry as available."

The board discussed Josh's proposal in recognition of the existence of non-registered Icelandic horses in the country. However, it is the mission statement of the USIHC to promote pure-bred Icelandic horses, and supporting unregistered horses in any shape or form would be in violation of this, the board decided. The



Ellen Lichtenstein of Alaska was the S2SS Rider of the Month for April.

board agreed to explore establishing a clear path for seeking registration of an unregistered horse.

At the June meeting, Lucy Nold reported that she had contacted U.C. Davis to inquire about a standardized process for checking the DNA of a given unregistered horse against the Icelandic horse database maintained there. She had not yet received an answer, but will follow up through her personal contacts at the university. Lucy will oversee working out a document outlining the pathway to registration of a presumed unregistered Icelandic horse. The document will describe the possible outcomes of a genetic analysis against the breeding registry database, and which steps should be taken to register the horse, in case the analysis confirms that both parents are in the database.

THE QUARTERLY & CANADA

A representative from the Canadian Icelandic Horse Federation contacted the USIHC to ask about the possibility of giving their members access to *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*, the USIHC's official publication. The board discussed several options with Quarterly editors Nancy Marie Brown and Nicki Esdorn, and Leslie Chambers responded to the CIHF with a proposal to share access to the online edition for a yearly fee.

ANNUAL MEETING

The USIHC board discussed the timing of the Annual Meetings and what would be best going forward in this age of Covid-19. They decided that the first weekend in November may be a better time of year for a meeting, rather than late January, as there are usually fewer weather-related problems. The current thought, however, was that organizing a meeting for November 2020 was not realistic.

The board will plan on holding a virtual meeting in January 2021. It is hoped that the USIHC can hold an in-person meeting in November 2021 in Des Moines, IA, hosted by the Toppur Club.

The Klettafjalla Club has also offered to host an annual meeting in Denver, CO. They will be penciled in for the November 2022 meeting.



In Colorado, Deborah Kenny and Skálmar frá Ketilsstöðum won the Pleasure Tölt Class in the USIHC Virtual Show.

BOARD MEETINGS

The USIHC board of directors met by conference call on April 14, May 12, June 9, and July 14. Complete minutes, including the monthly Treasurer's and Secretary's reports and the annual budget, can be found online at icelandics.org/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.



Pröstur frá Hvammi is owned by May S2SS Rider of the Month, Kristina Behringer.



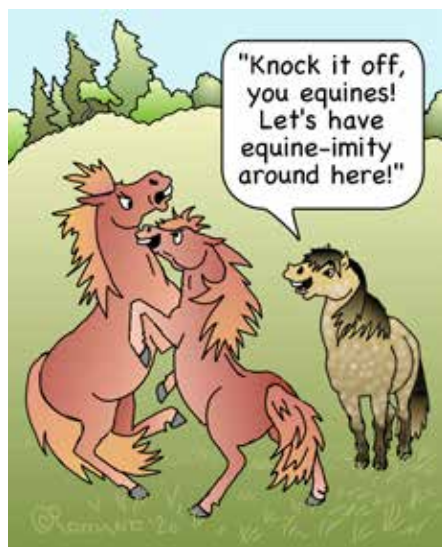
AN UNPRECEDENTED SITUATION

In July, FEIF President Gunnar Sturluson wrote:

Dear friends and members of Icelandic horse associations around the world! I hope you and your families are safe and well, and that you have been able to deal with the situation and attend to your horses as well as possible. With the Covid-19 pandemic, we are now facing an unprecedented situation, which is probably the most influential situation in peace time in modern history. It is a huge burden that affects the entire world. No one knows how it will develop. Our daily life, work, sport, and lifestyle, as well as travel and public gathering restrictions, make it impossible to organize many events.

The Board of FEIF therefore decided to suspend the FEIF WorldRanking until further notice, which means that no results will be accepted by FEIF for the time being. Big events like Landsmót, the Mid-European Championships, and the Nordic Championships, and of course the FEIF Youth Cup, as well as seminars, will not take place this year.

Other events, like the new Riders Camp in Norway, have been postponed until summer 2021. Therefore, let us focus on next year, when we will hopefully have the opportunity to organize and attend a variety of events again, among them the World Championships in Herning, Denmark. Unfortunately the Olympic



Games will be at the same time, but we will live up to that challenge!

All these decisions about cancellations and postponements of events have been made after careful consideration, in the interest of our community and with the welfare of the people of the world in mind. We all live at the moment in a time of challenge, and above all in a time when it is necessary to contribute our utmost to slow down the spread. We strongly urge you to follow the restrictions and rules of your national governments to help our society find its way out of this crisis.

LANDSMÓT 2020

The Icelandic Equestrian Association, the Horse Breeders Association, and Rangárbakkar (the management of Landsmót) decided to postpone this year's Landsmót, which was supposed to take place in Hella. Instead, Landsmót will be held in Hella in the summer of 2022.

Guests who have already purchased a ticket to Landsmót 2020 will receive an email from the ticket sale site, Tix, and all information regarding refunds will be accessible on www.landsmot.is. Ticket holders have three choices: 1) get a refund, 2) have their ticket validated for the 2022 event, or 3) simply become a sponsor. All the bookings on camping spaces will be refunded. Please send all requests regarding the event to landsmot@landsmot.is and regarding tickets to info@tix.is.



VIRTUAL RIDE

The end of the FEIF virtual ride Hello Hella came on July 6, which was scheduled to be the beginning of Landsmót 2020. The preparations, the training, and the joyful anticipation of Landsmót 2020 were real—and so was all the riding done by the participants of the virtual ride. By the end of March, the ride had reached a grand total of 27,328 km. And then all came to a standstill.

Many riders had to get out of the saddle and focus on other ways to be with their horses. When riding was not possible, we started counting the hours spent with horses—and thus recorded a wonderful summer break. In the virtual realm all things are possible, so 80 hours of quality horse time (at 8 hours per day), can easily translate into a 10-day "Horse Holiday."

If anything, the group of FEIF virtual riders, some of whom have joined our rides regularly since 2011, became stronger and more closely connected during lockdown. Via Facebook, we have shared the seasons and landscapes of different FEIF member countries, the anticipation of newly bought horses, the joys of newborn foals, and the tears over those who have died.

Will we ride again? Of course! The next FEIF Virtual Ride, "Returning to Herning," started on August 9. That gives you nearly a full year to get to the venue



of the 2021 World Championships; the championships will be held in Herning, Denmark on August 1-8, 2021. Registration for the virtual ride started at the beginning of August, but you can join at any time during the year.

Why not give it a go? The rules are simple: 1) you calculate the distance from your home to Herning, DK; 2) you register; 3) you keep a record of all your rides out into the countryside; and 4) you gradually make your way to the venue. You will be surprised how fast the miles add up.

The most rewarding aspect of it all is that you will meet a very welcoming, friendly group of Icelandic horse riders from all over the world on Facebook. Over the years this virtual group has grown into a strong network, often resulting in real meetings, on real horses, forming real friendship—rather than remaining purely virtual experience! Learn more on the virtual ride website: <http://feif-virtual.weebly.com/>.

FEI GUIDELINES

The International Federation for Equestrian Sports (FEI) has published a Policy for Enhanced Competition Safety During the Covid-19 Pandemic, aimed at assisting organizers with the safe resumption of international equestrian events in line with national and local restrictions. The policy includes guidelines on carrying out



a risk assessment to evaluate whether it is safe to hold an event. The policy includes general best practice recommendations and is to be implemented in conjunction with any requirements imposed by local authorities.

The policy includes: A framework outlining objectives, roles, and responsibilities; a decision-making system for organizers planning events during the Covid-19 pandemic; and best practices for FEI Event Organizers. Under this policy, conducting and documenting the risk assessment is mandatory for FEI Event Organizers. The policy will be continually reviewed and updated as more information becomes available.

BREEDING SHOWS

As Covid-19 restrictions are being lifted throughout Europe, we are happy that breeding shows can finally take place again. The first 2020 breeding evaluations took place in early summer in Iceland, Germany, and Sweden, in strict compliance with national Covid-19 regulations. Other countries, such as Denmark and Austria, have registered breeding shows for mid-summer. Dates and places can be found in the calendar on the FEIF website (www.feif.org). To learn more about the assessed horses, follow the link to World-Fengur.

LEISURE RIDING

All humans enjoy being accepted mem-

bers of a community, feeling loved, and being appreciated and honored for their contributions and effort. The Icelandic horse community offers all of this.

The FEIF Leisure Committee has identified a number of different aspects which may be attractive to Icelandic horse owners and riders:

Me&My Horse: This is the basis for everything. The joyful hours of freedom with your horse. The happiness of developing together with your horse. The little breaks during the week, when you can focus on your horse and yourself.

Meet&Compete: Participating in any competition, from T8 to Tölt in Harmony, Hestadagar, etc.

Meet&Learn: Any educational activity for horse and rider, ranging from horse-yoga to clinics and ordinary lessons.

Meet&Achieve: Sharing information and experiences, solving difficulties, securing access to riding trails, working to pass laws concerning riders' rights and safety, etc.

Meet&Tölt: Meeting for a joyful ride, whether it is a horse trek, a relay ride, a shorter tour, etc.

Meet&Contribute: The joy of being part of something big, for example, assisting as a volunteer at a World Championship or being a spectator at the championships and contributing by paying for the ticket. Any contribution belongs here.

This list is the future working plan for the FEIF Leisure Committee. One or more aspects can be selected for a year or more, and the whole list can be worked through over the years in a systematic way. The member countries of FEIF already offer all or most items on this list, but they need to be shared in a structured way to make them available to a broader range of riders or fans of the Icelandic horse.

Surveys with more than 3,000 respondents within the FEIF countries reveal that, outside Iceland, the majority of Icelandic horse riders are female and that almost all riders enjoy riding in nature, either alone or in groups. These surveys also reveal that the character of the Icelandic horse is conceived of as



being of utmost importance: Riders want a controllable and cooperative spirit, as well as a horse that is safe interacting with children, mountain bikers, hikers, and traffic in general.

In 2017, the Leisure Committee launched the Riding Horse Profile, which is a description of the character of any horse on any given day. The Riding Horse Profile was based on material from a large group of member countries, together with educational institutions in Iceland. The FEIF Breeding and Education Committees, as well as FEIF trainers, were involved.

The Leisure Committee, in parallel with the member countries, has also increased its focus on securing access to riding in nature. Rules and regulations are extremely different from country to country. The information collected on the FEIF Leisure Riding page (www.feif.org/LeisureRiding) serves as inspiration for people of various countries on how things may be done. Each country is encouraged to place information relevant to leisure riders on this web page.

HORSES OF ICELAND

Horses of Iceland's 2019 annual report lists the project's marketing actions of the last year, as well as the value created and

community development on social media. The results of HOI's marketing activities during the first four years after its launch in 2016 are a notable 54.7 million impressions on social media! The value created amounts to almost \$300,000, and 70 partners from 5 different countries have joined the project. HOI's followers on Facebook and Instagram total 110,300, while 1.5 million guests attended shows where HOI promoted the Icelandic horse and news features following press trips reached over 290 million people. HOI's videos were viewed more than 3 million times.

Other highlights of the year include: More than 30 videos were submitted to the video contest held in celebration of the International Day of the Icelandic Horse on May 1, while around Iceland, horse associations organized exciting events on that day. On Iceland's National Day, June 17, HOI held a demonstration of the different gaits and other events in central Reykjavík, which garnered considerable attention.

In July 2019, HOI and the Icelandic horse participated in the Falsterbo Horse Show in Sweden for the first time ever. The show, which celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, has strong roots in the international equestrian world and is the largest FEI event in Scandinavia.

HOI also participated in the World Championships for Icelandic Horses in Berlin, Equine Affaire in the U.S., and the Swedish International Horse Show. HOI was invited to the World Horse Culture Forum in China, and a Chinese delegation is interested in visiting Iceland to learn more about Icelandic horse culture.

The original contract between HOI and the Icelandic government expired at the end of 2019, but on April 2 it was formally extended by 18 months by the Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture, Kristján Þór Júlíusson. A new long-term contract is being worked on so that HOI can continue its important marketing operations for years to come.

MEDIA ATTENTION

During 2019, the Icelandic horse received some attention by international media. Here are a few examples:

FEI TV made two documentary episodes that were aired in February 2019, reaching approximately 240 million viewers.

Equus Worldwide, a documentary series on Horse & Country TV (which has 45 million subscribers) featured the Mývatn Open ice tölt competition and the equine studies program at Hólar University.

Articles on the Laufskálaréttir horse roundup appeared in the online edition of CNN Travel, as well as on Metro Online (the largest online newspaper in the UK).

YOUTH COUNTRY

Every year FEIF invites its member countries to submit a report on their activities and new ideas in the field of Youth work. All the reports are published, to serve as a resource for the other countries. The reports must be received by the FEIF Office (office@feif.org) no later than January 15 each year, and the FEIF Youth Country of the Year Award goes to the country shown to be most active or most innovative.

The winner receives a trophy and an additional place in the upcoming FEIF Youth Cup or Youth Camp. The reports must be written and must engage with the points listed in the invitation, found here: www.feif.org/Service/Documents/YouthWork.aspx

CLUB UPDATES



“Morning Bliss,” above left, by Jane Wehrheim of Alaska Icelandics. At top right, Janet Mulder competes on Njáll frá Flugumýri II in the USIHC Virtual Show; photo by Bryan Mulder. At bottom, Jane’s beautiful view of Alaska’s Knik Glacier through the ears of Drynur from Pegasus.

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 Jane Wehrheim

In Alaska, our summer riding season is typically a short one. We all wait in anticipation for the many events that fill our calendars full. This year, very different from years past, has found us “hunkering down”—yet our horses provide us with a much needed activity and an escape from the inside of our homes.

Taking part in the USIHC’s Virtual Summer Show offered AIHA members two Saturdays in June to come ride on an open track. These weekends were set aside for anyone who wanted assistance or coaching on how to ride their test or who

needed a videographer to provide footage. We filmed at least 10 tests each day. The first weekend, we had 11 riders total, with four who rode on both days. Our riders are all looking forward to receiving their feedback from the judges!

Most of the recreational trails throughout the state have stayed open during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has allowed us trail-riding opportunities. Those members who are participating in the USIHC’s S2SS Virtual Ride have racked up some miles.

Other local activities are also still taking place. For instance, Mounted Archery—which our Icelandics excel at—will be going on throughout summer and has a competition scheduled for August.

And, even though the majority of our summer’s events have been canceled, our horses know no difference. They are standing by, ready for us.



FLUGNIR

by Jackie Alschuler

Flugnir Board member Pam Hansen organized a Trail Obstacle Clinic at the Lost Creek Ranch, a 501c3 non-profit horse rescue, in Ellsworth, WI. Five Flugnir members and their Icelandic horses, along with two big horses, hand-walked and then rode through a number of traditional trail obstacles, such as cowboy curtain, opening and closing a gate, and walking through a dugout filled with water. After this low-key competition, we all enjoyed our socially distanced lunches as a rainstorm moved in.

HESTAFOLK

by Lisa McKeen

Covid-19 has done a job on us all! Here in Northwest Washington, clinics were cancelled, meet-ups were cancelled, and online communication became essential! We all began enjoying posts on Facebook and Instagram, and many emails.

Most of our members are riding a lot—our horses are saving our sanity. We are lucky to be horse people. We have found that we can work with our riding coach, Freya Sturm, through online work. Keeping our learning going keeps us engaged and helps us be better partners.

The *Quarterly* and the USIHC website are support that connect us too.

Hestafolk member Susan Johnson



Susan Johnson's lovely view through the ears of Vordis from Silver Creek Icelandics.



Hestafolk members Jessica Valenta, Brechelle Ware, and Sperlin rode steep terrain on 200 acres to round up these cattle, then drove them up the road to their summer pasture. At left, a happy Lauren Murphy on her new gelding, Andi from Evans Farm. Right, Serenity Perigo patiently uses clicker training to teach Bjarki from Extreme Farm to pick up a ball. Below, Linda Wallitner poses with Logn from Extreme Farms; photo by Loren Wallitner.



has logged 525 hours this year (so far!) as she prepares her mares, Lucy from Extreme Farm and Ivy (Vordis from Silver Creek Icelandics), for a four-day back-country trip in the Kalama area of Washington State.

The rest of us are getting riding hours in as well. Many of us are experimenting with learning through Intrinzen and finding the benefits to our horses to be profound. We are hoping to regroup this September with a beach ride and some gatherings down in the southern parts of Washington. Stay healthy everyone!





Klettafjalla treasurer Angie Calve enjoys a trail ride with Nanna from Morningstar.

KLETTAFJALLA

by Florie Miller

Needless to say, the year 2020 is not going according to plan! The Covid-19 virus changed all our lives. Of course all the scheduled events in our Rocky Mountains area were cancelled, due to the lock down and stay at home orders, and even though those orders are behind us now, some events still had to be cancelled because international travel is not possible.

The virus brought many unexpected changes. Some of us couldn't get to our horses for a while, and some of us all of a sudden had an almost unlimited amount of time to spend with our four-legged friends. Some of us had a feeling of isolation, and some of us saw more people than normal, because it was actually busy at the barn!

Since a lot of people lost their jobs or might be struggling financially, Klettafjalla board members quickly decided to set up an emergency support system. Club members can send a 100% confidential email to the club if they need help with board, hay, or other things, and they will be connected with a member who can assist. The idea is not to exchange money but rather services, like taking a horse in for a while if an owner can't care for it—a

great example of what a wonderful thing the Icelandic horse community is.

Another good thing given to us under these circumstances is that an unprecedented number of trainers offered online instruction. Top-notch lessons have become available to anyone around the world. Many Klettafjalla members have taken advantage of now being able to get lessons from Spain, Iceland, and Germany.

The popular 2020 USIHC Virtual Show just closed, with its deadline arriving as I was writing this article. Unsurprisingly, Klettafjalla members from all over our region participated. Isabella Sharpsteen, who lives in southern Colorado, competed for the first time with her horse Forseti from Strawberry Hill. She said, "We have just recently started tölt training and are testing the waters!" The German native is excited about her horse's potential and can't wait to participate in more shows.

The people at Tamangur Icelandics in Colorado are always active and are sending multiple entries to the show as well. And so are our most northern members at Gyetorp II in Wyoming. Good job everyone!

As things are slowly opening up again, we are seeing some in-person

events pop up too. Gyetorp II hosted the Cheyenne Dressage and Eventing Club, giving them a presentation about the Icelandic horse along with a small group riding demonstration. Covid-19 guidelines were followed by wearing masks and observing social distancing. Thanks to Emily Potts for supplying the beautiful promotional material from Horses of Iceland and copies of the *Quarterly* from the USIHC.

Julia Anderson is hosting an Intro to Working Equitation clinic in Fairplay, CO on July 25. This is a really good chance to learn more about a discipline that is all about horsemanship, responsiveness, and having a good working relationship with your horse. This discipline is based on traditional European styles of riding used during fieldwork.

Please keep checking our website, klettafjalla.com, and our social media pages to stay up-to-date on events and news. There is always something going on!



Klettafjalla member Isabella Sharpsteen and her horse Forseti (aka Lille) from Strawberry Hill competed in the USIHC Virtual Show.

NEIHC

by Jennifer Bergantino and Phebe Kiryk

April through early June is ordinarily “mud season” in New England and throughout the Northeast. Winter thaw gives way to April showers; trails and outdoor arenas are either slick with melting ice or too soft, and vulnerable to damage by tölting hooves. This year, however, our New England spring was amazing. While other aspects of life were fraught with far too many “can’t do’s,” we were blessed with cool, dry, bug-free air and rideable fields and trails. For those of us who were lucky enough to have access to our horses and could ride, trails are what kept many NEIHC members sane.

Our horses connected us to each other, to nature, and to living in-the-moment. Casual trail rides were the place where we could commiserate about dyeing our own hair or about fitness regimens going out the window, share important strategies on how to avoid being selected as the sole family member to venture out to pick up yet another unhealthy meal, and occasionally to fall into deep philosophical discussions



Anna Wallstrom on Greta and Erika Tighe on Andvari enjoy a beautiful spring day in the Northeast.



Jennifer Bergantino and Katrin model the Covid-19 look.

while our horses meandered in the woods between tölt paths. Our horses in nature became both the respite for forgetting big troubles, and the time for laughter about the small things. For many of us the Sea 2 Shining Sea (S2SS) ride, the annual USIHC virtual cross-country trail race, kept us con-



Brynja Meehan and Thor spend some quality time in the paddock.

nected beyond our own barns!

Like many of us, the Flanigans at Fire and Ice in Maine used this unexpected time to bring back-burnered chores to the front. They now have not only a spotless tack room, but horses with impeccable oral hygiene!

Nikkisue Flanigan reports on their new barn and their high school senior daughter: "Alicia's high school diploma should be arriving in the next few days, so she's excited. She is, of course, bummed that she isn't in Iceland training horses for Siggí at Hestheimar. We have been finishing up things on the to-do list in the barn. The tack room floor is installed, and the grain room floor, hay platform, and small barn have all been painted. Alicia has been training and having fun with the horses, conditioning them and keeping their brains happy, and always working to improve. The horses have enjoyed their massages and chiropractic treatments, and the two year-old fillies learned all about getting baths. Pretty much, we have been busy getting things done on the farm that are usually put off, as there is always somewhere else to be or something else we have to do."

All aspects of life seem to have moved online and become virtual. Six months ago, none of us would have thought that we could learn and train, much less compete on horseback, "virtually"! But online we went. Charity Simard, Phebe Kiryk, and Nancy Rohlf's from the Merrimack Valley Icelandics group were among several NEIHC members who participated in "Ask Gudmar" sessions, reaching across the sea to Iceland for expert training with Guðmar Pétursson. Other NEIHC members learned about riding with "flow" through Gaeðinga Dressage, offered by Carrie Lyons Brandt and Laura Benson. And many of us brushed off our competition whites to compete by video in the USIHC Virtual Show.

For now, we just patiently stay hanging hopefully in the balance, trying to anticipate when Iceland will permit American riders to once again enjoy the beauty of that country and the equestrian magic of touring and training!

Thank you to everyone who shared their photos and stories and rides and horses!



Above, an early summer trail ride in Delaware County, NY by NEIHC members Cindy Dunne on Von, Heleen Heyning on Duna, Brigit Huwyler on Prinsessa, and Inez Valk on Krækja. Below, with only the Virtual Show to compete in, Alicia Flanigan of Fire and Ice found extra time this spring to attend to her horse's oral hygiene.



SIRIUS

by Frances Rospotynski

The year 2020 has changed our lives so quickly and brought so many disappointments to us, with the cancellation of our beloved annual horse venues and adventures. The Sirius Club of Ohio and Kentucky had planned many events, only to wait and see how Covid-19 would change our lives. The Ohio Equine Affaire 2020, at which we had planned a club booth in April, was the first to be canceled.

At the beginning of each year, I like to set my horse and rider goals. This year my dear friend Dannette Potter and her Tennessee Walking Horse, Cash, agreed to join me and my Icelandic horse, Landi, on a new horse adventure at Creek Side Horse Park, located in Stark County, OH.

Creek Side Horse Park is a beautiful park on 450 acres, with private horse trails, a pavilion, primitive campsites with tie lines, a mounted archery course, and a certified mountain trail course. Creek Side hosts many events, including the Big Mounted Archery Event, Ohio Quarter Horse Association Rides (OQHA), the Extreme Cowboy Association Race (EXCA), and the International Mounted Trail Challenge Association (IMTCA) competition.

Both Dannette and I waited to see if our Mountain Trail Obstacle clinic would



Not all events this summer were cancelled: Sirius member Frances Rospotynski and Landi attended a (socially distanced) Mountain Trail Obstacle clinic.

be cancelled. But Ohio had begun to slowly open up, and social distancing was the new normal: Creek Side said the Kelly Chapman Mountain Trail Clinic was on, so we went, with masks and hand sanitizer in hand.

Our clinician, Kelly Chapman, a natural horse trainer, has been around horses her entire life. She has worked with a wide range of horses across all breeds, disciplines, and levels of training. Kelly's goal is to help riders gain respect and to form better relationships with their horses using natural horsemanship.

Our first day started with the course syllabus and insights into how the judges would score the contestants during the competition. This clinic was special because many of the attendees would be staying overnight for a competition the following day.

At the end of the introductory session, we were instructed to get our horse ready for the mountain trail course to be worked in hand. We needed a rope halter, a 12- to 15-foot lead, a stick with a rope or a longe whip or a short whip, and leg wraps (to protect the horse's legs when stepping off obstacles). Kelly had us work with our horses doing basic ground exercises, such as disengaging the hind-quarters, backing, and longeing. After the group was proficient at each task, we were

allowed to explore many of the ground obstacles on our own.

Creek Side has a myriad of obstacles, including two balance beams (low and high), many bridges (crooked, suspension, teetering, shaking, and truss), a water box, a pond, rolling hills, a trench, a cross-log box, ladders, stairs, a cake box, and much more.

After we accomplished the trial obstacles in hand, we took a break for lunch. After that, we rode our horses through the course. We had the option of not doing any obstacles we did not feel comfortable doing. I seriously think my Icelandic horse would have done the entire course, but I let myself overthink things a bit.

We went through the trench—which is dug deeply into the ground, with the bottom filled with shallow water. We crossed bridges, rode over a maze, across a poles box, and walked through the water box.

After riding the course, Dannette suggested we go into the pond. We both entered the water, and suddenly Landi started pawing with his right front hoof, then his left front, then right, then left. I thought, "Oh no! He's going to lie down with my new saddle on!" Tapping his side rapidly, I made it out of the water without getting dunked. We all were laughing, though, as he must have thought it was a great day for a swim.

We had a wonderful two-day clinic. Between the exquisite park, the delightful instructor, and the incredible spring weather, it was the fun horse experience we will always remember about the year 2020.

For more news from Sirius Club members Sherry Hoover and Jane Coleman, see the Virtual Learning article in this issue.

ST. SKUTLA

by Molly Weimer

It was a challenging spring for our upstate New York members: In addition to the Covid-19 pandemic, with all its restrictions, we have had a crazy weather pattern—snow and freezing temperatures in May, followed by 93-degree heat a week later. The weather continues to vacillate between



Sirius members Kerstin Lundgren and Galdur from Unicorn Valley (left) and Jane Coleman and Lilla practiced social distancing on the trail.

cool and breezy and hot and humid. We are used to this kind of weather, but it's been more extreme this year.

Once the long winter breaks, though, we get excited for the summer season. Steven and Andrea Barber's Sand Meadow Farm in Mendon, NY is usually filled with visitors—people come to meet Icelandic horses, take lessons, attend clinics, etc. Andrea writes, "It's always bustling and crazy, and we enjoy every minute of it. But, of course, this year has been very different. When the most severe restrictions were in place, it meant no visitors at all. At first this was depressing. However, we soon realized it was a blessing in disguise.

"For the first time in many years, we were able to spend time—just us—with our horses. With no distractions from visitors, and no obligations to rush off to, we could not only ride our horses, but just hang out with them. Just be with them. What at first seemed like a sad time, turned into a magical time for us to reconnect with our horses. It really helped us remember why we got into the horses in the first place."

"Now things have opened up more. We are, with modifications, once again able to welcome visitors. It's nice to at least start to get back to normal. But that



The Windswept Farm gang out on a ride in late spring. From left to right: Magni, Njóla, Sara, and Elja (with Carrie Brindisi riding). Photo by Katherine Goldberg-Forrest.

little bit of isolation really recharged us and we appreciate having had that special opportunity."

Pandemic nonetheless, club members are still enjoying their Icelandics. Due to the virus, a clinic that was scheduled for July with Carrie Brandt at Sand Meadow Farm had to be cancelled; but four NEIHC

members (Andrea Barber, Katherine Goldberg-Forrest, Debbie Noto, and Molly Weimer) are participating in Carrie Brandt and Laura Benson's online Google Classroom course in Gæðingur Dressage. "It is turning out to be very thorough, informative, and useful," they report. "We are encouraged to turn in video 'homework' each week, which is then followed by an instructive comment from either Carrie or Laura."

Katherine Goldberg-Forrest of Windswept Farm from Brooktondale, NY adds, "We have been so grateful for our farm and for having our horses at home during this crazy time. Riding and training have continued in earnest, especially now that I am home all day! I've also been able to become a human slow-feeder: Bonus! Our herd consists of two young horses from the Cornell University research herd and two old mares who are helping to show them the ropes. We have great trails and seasonal roads to explore in this beautiful part of New York. The two Cornell horses were started by Carrie Brandt and Terral Hill at Taktur Icelandics last summer, and I'm now moving through Jess Haynsworth's Clicker Training/Young Horse Starting series online with them. Aside from that, we adventure around roads, trails, and fields as often as we can."



St. Skutla Club members Steven and Andrea Barber hanging out with their stallion Strákur frá Vatnsleysu. Photo by Steven Barber.

HORSE OF A DIFFERENT COLOR

by Kristin Moorhead

The colorful world of Icelandic horses has just become more colorful!

One of the riches of the Icelandic horse is the wealth of colors that exist in the breed. I remember how surprised I was when my chestnut mare had her second foal. Her first filly was a near clone of herself, so I wasn't expecting a jet-black filly the second time. What a magical potion of genetics this ancient breed carries, I thought.

The color palette of the Icelandic horse is so broad that there are over a hundred names for horse colors and patterns in the Icelandic language.

But it is very rare that an entirely new color pattern emerges. This is where Ellert frá Baldurshaga (IS2013180518) comes in. Ellert has the distinction of being the first Icelandic horse in the world with his unique color. He is a bay dun with what the WorldFengur studbook (www.worldfengur.com) now classifies as "W21 spotting."

The Icelandic word for his W21 color pattern is *ýruskjóttur*. A loose translation of that in English would be "drizzled skewbald." If I were to name his color I would describe him as café-au-lait with dollops of frothed milk.

A FINE SPECIMEN

Ellert is a bay dun with a dark dorsal stripe down his back. He has a white belly and legs, with a spattering of white on his neck and shoulder area and going across his flanks. Ellert is bald-faced, with partly blue eyes. He really is a striking horse.

He is also a good example of the breed—for more than just his color.

Ellert was bred by Baldur Eiðsson at the farm Bakkakoti in the south of Iceland. His parents are the blue dun stallion Sær frá Bakkakoti, who holds an honor prize for offspring (meaning that 50 of his offspring have been evaluated and his BLUP score is 118 or above). Ellert's dam was also a blue dun, the mare Kengála frá Búlandi. The ancestry was definitely there for a fine horse, and that Ellert is. His unique color was just an added bonus. As Baldur told a reporter from CNN in



The filly Einstök, shown here with her dam at Landsmót 2018, proves that stallion Ellert frá Baldurshaga (IS2013180518) passes on his unusual new color. All photos by Kristin Moorhead.

2018, "This is unbelievably lucky, because these two blood lines are two of the best breeding blood lines in Iceland, coming together to make this beautiful stallion."

Ellert is also praised by his trainers, Rósa Birna Þorvaldsdóttir and Daniel Larsen. "Ellert has a good character, he is fun to work with, and he is always eager to learn." Ellert was evaluated at an official breeding show and scored 8.56 for conformation. He scored 8.5 for tölt and 8.2 overall.

Ellert is, regardless of his color, a fine specimen and a first-prize stallion. There is no downside to breeding to Ellert—but of course, everyone wanted to know if he would pass on his unique color pattern.

THE STORY OF COLOR

I first learned of and met Ellert when I attended Landsmót, Iceland's National Horse Festival, in 2018. Alongside the sport and breeding shows, throughout

the week there were various training and breeding sessions offered for the Landsmót guests. I was quite curious about this new color, so I attended the presentation put on by Freyja Imsland, who holds a Ph.D. from Uppsala University.

Freyja is an expert on the genetics of color. To say that she is enthusiastic about Ellert and his unique color pattern is an understatement. Ellert has become somewhat of a celebrity in Iceland. Freyja has appeared with him on the Icelandic TV show Landinn. Ellert has his own Instagram account (@ellertfrabaldurshaga) and his own Facebook page (Ellert frá Baldurshaga).

At Landsmót 2018, Freya explained the genetic mutation that produced Ellert's color. Once upon a time, she began, all horses were dun. Over time, humans selectively bred horses to create the different color patterns that we have today. Which means that, at some point,



The name “Einstök” means special or unique—a perfect choice for Ellert’s first “drizzled skewbald” filly.

all the horse colors we love (except dun) were new. Imagine seeing the first roan or tobiano or chestnut, black, white, etc. come out of your herd!

As Freya explained, DNA constantly changes: It mutates with every generation. Usually these genetic changes are not noticeable, but in Ellert’s case one mutation had a noticeable effect on his color. This mutation produced the new W21 color pattern that Ellert, and now some of his offspring, carry.

COLOR GENETICS

Freya explained that each of Ellert’s foals would have a 50% chance of inheriting the new color variant.

Ellert has only been bred with solid color mares—chestnut, black, or bay—so that the breeders can easily detect if his color pattern has been passed on to his offspring. In 2018, a collective yippee! was yelled out in Iceland when one of Ellert’s offspring showed the color variant.



Ellert is not just a horse of a different color: At a breeding horse evaluation in Iceland in June 2020, he received 8.56 for conformation and 8.12 for rideability, for a total score of 8.27. His tölt score was 8.5. Here he greets visitors at the 2018 Landsmót in Reykjavík.

I had the opportunity to see Ellert and his brand new filly, with her mama, at the Landsmót breeding presentation. Her color is not similar to Ellert’s bay dun, nor to her dam’s chestnut, for that matter, but she does have the W21 “drizzled skewbald” markings. In her case, she has a splattering of black on a white base color. She is a unique little filly and will undoubtedly become very sought after.

“Ellert represents a unique opportunity for breeders in Iceland,” Freya notes. “The more varied our horses are, the richer we are. The diversity seen in our domestic animals is our treasure.”

American breeders of Icelandic horses will also be interested in bringing this new color variant into their herds, but it is unlikely that you will see mini-Ellerts in the U.S. any time soon. Artificial insemination is not allowed in Iceland, so the only way to get a W21 color variant is to breed a mare to Ellert in Iceland, export the mare to the U.S., and hope the new color is passed down. (Or, of course, board your pregnant mare in Iceland until you see what you’ve got, then decide on exporting; either way, it’s pricey.) Following this plan, however, one of Ellert’s offspring was born in Germany in 2019—with the W21 color variant.

Keep your eyes open: I predict that, one day, one of Ellert’s offspring will be stateside. In the meantime, if you want to see cute little W21 babies, follow Ellert’s Facebook page!

One thing is sure about our beloved Icelandic horses: You can’t put them in a box. There are huge variations in their looks, in their personalities, and in their talents. Just when you think you’re starting to get a handle on this breed, there comes along a whole new color. These horses keep you guessing—and it sure is fun!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bianca Britton, “New Horse Coat Color Pattern”: www.cnn.com/2018/11/28/sport/icelandic-horse-iceland-ellert-intl-spt/index.html

Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir, “New Coat Colour in the Icelandic Horse”: <https://www.horsesoficeland.is/se/gemenskap/berattelser/new-coat-colour-in-the-icelandic-horse/912>

A SUMMER ECZEMA VACCINE?

by Nancy Marie Brown



For 20 years, scientists in Iceland have been working on a vaccine against summer eczema, or sweet itch, in Icelandic horses. In March 2020 they reached a milestone: They exported 27 vaccinated Icelandic horses to Europe. These horses will be monitored for the next two to three years to see how effective the vaccine is and if there are any side effects. With luck, there will finally be a cure for this painful and unsightly chronic skin condition.

Summer eczema is caused by an allergic reaction to proteins in the saliva of several species of biting midges in the genus *Culicoides*. These biting midges are widespread in the U.S. and Europe, but are not found at all in Iceland, so Icelandic foals born there do not receive any immunity from their dams and have no opportunity to build up antigens against the insect proteins.

If they leave Iceland and go to live in a midge-filled area, the horses' hypersensitivity to the *Culicoides* proteins makes the bug bites extremely itchy. Driven a little crazy by the itch, the horses begin scratching however they can. Some horses rub out their manes and tails. Some repeatedly kick and bite their bellies. Some rub the skin off their faces. Without immediate treatment, the itchy spots can develop into large, open sores and become infected, which causes more itching and rubbing. The rubbing quickly becomes a habit, and

the eczema becomes a chronic problem, returning each summer as soon as the bugs hatch.

Dealing with summer eczema can drive the horse's owner a little crazy, too (as I know from experience). We try lotions and fly sprays, supplements and special diets. We install barn fans and insect-proof doors. We keep our horses inside between dusk and dawn, when the bugs are most active. We treat them with corticosteroids (which work) and antihistamines (which don't). And we buy special summer eczema blankets and hoods to keep the bugs at bay while the horses graze. (Zebra stripes are supposed to be especially good at outwitting biting flies of all kinds.) When none of this works, we have even re-homed a favorite horse to a bug-free part of the country, preferring to be without his company than to watch him scratch until he bleeds.

THE EXPORTERS' DILEMMA

While 10% of horses of any breed come down with summer eczema, Icelandics are especially susceptible.

A study in the 1990s, based on a questionnaire, found that between 16 and 18% of the Icelandic horses in Sweden and Norway suffered from summer eczema. Counting only horses imported from Iceland, however, brought the percentages up to 26 to 27%.

A 2006 study of 330 horses exported to Germany, Denmark, and Sweden

"OMG, is she serious? Just because we had an allergic reaction to bugs last summer?" So says Robin and Will Guernsey's Glytja on her Facebook page, *IamGlytja*. Research says zebra stripes do confuse flies.

found that 34.5% showed signs of summer eczema. In general, it took two years after export for the disease to show up; in some cases the horse remained eczema-free for eight years before coming down with it.

The higher percentage of cases in this study (34.5%) than the earlier one (27%) may be due to the fact that the researchers themselves clinically examined all of the horses in 2006. They may have noticed mild symptoms that the horses' owners could easily have overlooked. They also suspect that horse owners who lived in areas where summer eczema was a problem were more inclined to volunteer for the study. When only horses exported to an area known to harbor *Culicoides* midges were counted, the prevalence of summer eczema rose to 54%.

As these studies show, summer eczema is a serious problem for breeders in Iceland who are hoping to export more of their stock. Whichever study comes closer to the truth, we know that one quarter to one half of the horses exported from Iceland will develop summer eczema. As the researchers note, "The export of horses is followed by great environmental changes, including different weather conditions and introduction to new microbes and insects. Together with stress, due to the transport, these changes seem to influence the immune system negatively."

While some of these stressful changes apply to domestic-bred Icelandic horses moving from a midge-free part of the U.S. to one with midges, in general it's thought that domestic-bred Icelandics are no more likely to get summer eczema than are horses of other breeds. A vaccine, however, would help horses of all breeds and origins.

THE VACCINE

At the 2020 FEIF Conference, Sigríður Björnsdóttir, the lead researcher on the 2006 paper, presented the latest developments in the fight to prevent and treat summer eczema.

She based her talk on a 2019 article on the creation of a summer eczema vaccine by Sigríður Jónsdóttir and her colleagues at the University of Iceland's Institute for Experimental Pathology at Keldur and the University of Bern, Switzerland. Other researchers who have been involved in Keldur's 20-year research project on summer eczema come from Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, the University of Bristol in the U.K., and the Icelandic company ORF Genetics.

For a hundred years, people with allergies like hay fever have been given a treatment called allergen-specific immunotherapy: They are injected with a dose of the allergen (pollen, in the case of hay fever) in a form that causes their immune systems to produce antibodies but not otherwise react (by sneezing, itching, etc.). Allergen-specific immunotherapy can be inexpensive, effective, and long-lasting. The challenge is finding the right part of the allergen to inject.

Three previous attempts to use allergen-specific immunotherapy to treat summer eczema in horses have failed. All three used "whole-body extracts" prepared from *Culicoides* midges—essentially using the entire crushed bug as the active ingredient in the vaccine. These extracts contained hundreds of proteins and other substances. The salivary gland proteins—the ones that cause the itching—represented only a tiny fraction of the extract.

Using a molecular approach, the Icelandic and Swiss researchers reported in 2019 that they have produced pure samples of 27 different salivary proteins from three different species of *Culicoides* midges.



The zebra-striped Top Reiter summer eczema rug on Brá of Fire and Ice Icelandics. Says Alicia Flanigan, "What a difference these rugs make!"



Better than zebra rugs or steroids or lotions would be the summer eczema vaccine currently under development in Iceland. Here the research team loads one of their test horses for the trip to Germany to see how well the vaccine works in a buggy area. Photo by Gunnar Freyr Gunnarsson.

By testing these proteins in healthy Icelandic horses still in Iceland—and therefore never exposed to biting midges—they learned that which proteins are most important varies among horses; the vaccine the team developed contains the nine major allergens.

The efficacy of a vaccine depends on what substances the allergens are mixed with, as well. The researchers created two different forms of the summer eczema vaccine, each with a different, carefully chosen substance, or adjuvant, that will boost the immune response and direct it to specific immune-system cells.

How the vaccine is delivered can also make a difference. Injecting the allergen into the lymph nodes, instead of into the skin, as is often done for human allergy sufferers, reduced the number of shots needed to get an immune response from 54 to three, the scientists found.

They might be able to do away with shots altogether, however. Using a special bit and allowing the horse to eat transgenic barley grains that contain the *Culicoides* proteins, they successfully introduced the allergen into the mucus membrane lining the horse's mouth. Ph.D. student Sara Björk Stefánsdóttir is currently working on developing a desensitization regimen, using the transgenic barley, to treat horses who already have summer eczema. That testing will be done at Cornell University, which has a research herd of Icelandic horses living in a midge-prone area.

The two different vaccines for prevention and treating summer eczema are now ready to be tested in clinical trials. The 27 Icelandic horses exported in March—most going to Switzerland—are the first test sub-

jects. Explained immunologist Sigurbjörg Þorsteinsdóttir, the project leader at Keldur, "By testing different vaccination methods, that is, injection routes, and different mixtures of allergens and adjuvants, we believe that we have found a method to direct the immune response against the allergens in the right direction so that it can be used as a vaccine."

We'll have to wait at least two years to know if she is right.

Concluded Sveinn Steinarsson, the chairman of the Horse Breeders Association of Iceland, everyone "has high hopes that the vaccine can be used as a preventive measure to protect the horses that are exported so that they will at least have a similar tolerance for summer eczema as Icelandic horses born abroad. A good result from the research will above all improve the well-being of Icelandic horses abroad, and it will also be helpful in terms of the marketing and sale of horses from Iceland."

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ANOTHER WAY TO LUNGE

by Nicki Esdorn



2020 has been a very different year for all of us, all over the Icelandic horse world. Many of us no longer have access to lessons of any kind—in person. Luckily, many excellent horse trainers and riding instructors have made the effort to put their wisdom and coaching online.

An early adopter of online teaching is Babette Teschen, a German trainer we wrote about way back in 2009: See “Gladur Takes an Online Lungeing Course” by Yvonne Eberling in Issue Three 2009 of the *Quarterly*.

Yvonne, like me, had not been a fan of lungeing (or longeing; both spellings are correct) before taking the course. As a beginning rider, when she was under time pressure “and just wanted to have my horse move around quickly, I lunged my horse,” she wrote. “Many people do this. They may not know that, if not done right, lungeing a horse can cause more harm than good.”

When it is done right, however, lungeing can be “a great opportunity to tone their horse’s bodies,” Yvonne explained. “The intention should never be that your horse zips around a few times and then you call it a day... The general idea, on the contrary, is to teach the horse to carry us without any harm done to its body. It has to learn to round up its back, lift its shoulders, and use its rear end to actively carry our weight. And correct lungeing is a great aid to teach a horse to do so.”

Back when Yvonne tried it with *Glaður*, in 2009, Babette’s brand-new lungeing

course was available, alas, only in German. But the latest version is available in English—and the course has now been improved with new experiences, ideas, and exercises. “A Course in Lungeing” by Babette Teschen has been a huge success in Europe, and I hope it will reach many more people now!

MAKE IT FUN

Babette’s original lungeing course focused mainly on developing a physically correct and healthy way of going. The new course builds on that goal, but emphasizes the importance of the mental aspects: How does the horse feel? How can you turn a dull exercise of running in circles into a playful, varied, and fun game for both horse and human?

If the horse is confident and enjoys the work, she will put ever more effort into it! The goal is to teach the horse a good and correct way of going at all times, not just on the lunge line or under saddle. Horses trained this way develop beautiful muscling and a strong topline, and become safer, calmer, and more balanced under the rider.

I was very impressed by Babette’s website and her training philosophy and decided to try the course with my nine-year-old mare, *Jenný*. I started by downloading and studying the 230-page PDF book and watching the online videos. Everything was very well written and explained. I acquired a comfortable, padded cavesson. I already had a supple, 18-foot lunge line, a dressage whip, and a short lungeing whip. I had a

The end result of the online lungeing course: *Jenný* shows a beautiful effort to trot on a long line, with a softly bended neck and poll, lifted withers, and swinging back. Nicki tries to mirror her body position and cheers her on. All photos by Joerg Esdorn.

work space with decent, safe footing that was not slippery or too hard.

First, *Jenný* needed to become comfortable with the new equipment. A cavesson should fit around her head quite snugly, and she also needed to learn to accept my holding on to her directly on the cavesson or just a few inches away from it. With clicker training, getting her used to the cavesson went fast and smoothly.

WALK WITH ME

Then I needed to teach her to walk with me on a curved circular path. Actually, I had to learn a lot here, too. In this new way of lungeing, the person is no longer standing still in the middle of the ring, but actively guiding the horse by walking with it at head level, holding the lunge line like a rein. If I walked too slowly and fell behind, I would pull *Jenný* into the center of the circle and would affect her balance. I needed to be in balance, too, and to stay relaxed and soft, so that *Jenný* could also relax at the poll.

Much easier said than done—and different when walking to the right or left! Running free, horses go into curves like a motorcycle: They lean into it and put all their weight on the inside shoulder and leg. Their head and neck are their balanc-

ing pole, turned to the outside. I needed to teach Jenný to tackle curves in a more upright way, moving like a train, not a motorcycle: She needed to turn with a soft bend, picking up her inside shoulder and supporting herself with her inside hind leg.

This way of going is the basic building block for everything else. It moves the horse's center of mass underneath where the rider will be sitting, so both horse and rider can be in balance. Changing the way a horse uses its body in a turn does not happen in a few days: It takes weeks and weeks. However, Babette gives you lots of ideas on how to make this basic training varied and fun, with all kinds of breaks, games, and exercises.

HOLD MY HAND

The next step is leading from a distance. Going in balance on a circle is not easy for a horse! Babette uses the example of a little kid trying to balance walking along the top of a wall. She wants a hand to hold onto, right? A soft, stretched-out hand, with her "spotter" going along right next to her, ready to support her and never pushing or pulling! With this image in mind, Jenný and I tried trotting slowly. Well, it took many tries, and I certainly got a lot fitter in the process!

But after a few months, Jenný and I are definitely getting better at this! We do different exercises, not always on a circle, but doing a slalom, turning corners, and in straight lines. We do shoulder-in, haunches-in, and sidestepping. It is really a lot of fun.

When I ride, I can feel the difference.



First Jenný must learn to accept the feeling of the cavesson and Nicki's hand right on it. Leading, Nicki's hand is very gentle and supportive, asking for a soft inside bend, a giving poll, and supportive hind legs. Nicki's whip hand reminds Jenný to lift her inside shoulder. When they advance to a little longer line, they both trot in the same direction. Nicki's body position supports Jenný's bend and her lifted inside shoulder.

The point of this way of training is to teach the horse a good and healthy way of moving. Side reins or other contraptions are not needed. The horse "owns it," and uses this new way of moving all the time, not just under your direction. A strong, balanced, agile horse changes mentally, too: Jenný became more confident and proud, even among her herd mates.

ANYONE CAN DO IT

There is a ton of information and answers to all kinds of questions in Babette's 230 pages and videos—including a special section for gaited horses. While it takes weeks and months to get good at this kind of lungeing, the first improvements come quickly, and the variety keeps you going. Most of all, it is the change in the horse that is so fun to see—how it becomes ever more beautiful and confident. And anyone can do this! You don't have to be a super rider or a professional trainer!



There is so much pressure to perform in today's horse world. To quote Babette: "There is another way!" Exertion and challenge are good, but we must not forget to work our horses with an open heart, love, and joy.

RESOURCES

To find "A Course in Lungeing" by Babette Teschen, go to www.you-and-your-horse.com. The course costs 45 Euros (about \$51).

To find Babette Teschen's German website, go to www.wege-zum-pferd.de

To find the article "Gladur Takes a Lungeing Course" go to www.icelandics.org, click on Quarterly, then Topical Index, and look for it under Training and Riding Instruction, Issue #903. Click on the article and you will be taken to the issue.

VIRTUAL LEARNING

When Covid-19 reached the U.S. last January and “Stay Home, Stay Safe” orders began sweeping the country, Icelandic horse trainers and riding instructors around the world suddenly needed new business plans. If people couldn’t travel or gather in groups, there could be no clinics, no shows, no camps, no treks in Iceland. How could trainers and instructors continue to make a living?

They got creative. As we reported in Issue Two 2020 of the *Quarterly*, many of them moved their clinics and coaching online—where USIHC members enthusiastically joined them.

Below are reports from Icelandic horse riders who are taking part in two of the virtual learning opportunities we reported on in the last issue: “Gæðinga Dressage” with Laura Benson of Valkyrie Icelandics in California and Carrie Brandt of Taktur Icelandics in Kentucky, and the Ask Guðmar online community of Guðmar Pétursson of Hestaland in Iceland.

We also have reports about two additional online options: Nicole Kempf’s Cyber Clinic and the Alfadans Liberty School, taught online by Caeli Cavanagh.

If you have had a good experience with virtual learning, or if you know of an opportunity we haven’t yet featured, please let us know! Send your comments to quarterly@icelandics.org.

GÆÐINGA DRESSAGE

by Sherry Hoover

At the end of March, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic in Ohio, the Gæðinga Dressage online class with Laura Benson and Carrie Brandt saved me from the lock-down blues.

After registration and an introduction in Google Classroom, the members of the class were encouraged to meet one another via Google Classroom. We were a diverse class with a wide range of ages, locations, and skills. Google Classroom provided our means of receiving our reference material, movies, and assignments. This class became my snowy, rainy, cold day need-to-ride reason to get out of the house and on my horse.



“I’ve dreamed of starting an online educational community for many years, and I’ve finally gotten the downtime to get it going.”

One of the assignments early on in the class was to provide a video of you and your horse performing examples of speed and directional control at different gaits. I dreaded the video portion of the class. I knew my horse and I were not proficient in the exercises. We filmed our examples, with my husband Ron behind the camera. What an eye-opener! What I thought we were doing and where, in my mind, my legs were placed was not what the camera portrayed. Oh no, I needed to send in that video for those accomplished trainers and instructors, Carrie and Laura, to view? But they were gracious with their suggestions for my leg position and very helpful with explaining why our left circles were so bad. My horse Tandri was controlling the movements to the left and not responding to my corrections. Not only their suggestions but also the reasoning behind their suggestions changed my partnership with my horse, and our circles became better and better with each ride.

Video became my friend. It was very helpful to view my ride and to have a conversation with my instructors while watching my ride. The conversations and sharing of videos helped us see that each of us in the class had different areas that needed assistance. Several Zoom sessions gave us the opportunity to ask questions and to talk to our instructors and classmates.

As the class progressed and more

dressage skills were added, I panicked. How could I possibly show all the dressage skills that they presented? Carrie and Laura walked us through the steps and reminded us that it is all about connection and the communication between ourselves and our horses. It is a journey. Where did you start and where you are now?

Today Tandri and I continue to work on our communication and connection. The online class started out being a little scary, but now I can’t wait for the next online class offered by Laura Benson and Carrie Brandt.

GÆÐINGA DRESSAGE

by Jane Coleman

The pandemic restrictions last spring were challenging, to say the least. In spite of the limitations, I used the time to do something I might not normally try.

I had planned to send my horse Lilla for training at Taktur Icelandics in Kentucky. Instead of sending Lilla away, the trainer became me! I enrolled in Taktur’s online Gæðinga Dressage clinic. The clinic was challenging for two reasons: I had never done an online course, nor had I ever done dressage. So off we went.

To begin, I had to send Carrie Brandt and Laura Benson a three-minute video of a dressage exercise I was working on with my horse. They gave me access to several videos they had done showing examples of exercises I could choose, with great

instructions—written, verbally, and on the video. After I finally found someone to videotape me, I then had to figure out how to send the video to Carrie and Lala.

They gave me feedback on that first video, and then I had to submit a second, six-minute freestyle dressage video for our final exam. No rules, just six minutes (as close as you could come, without going over)—and have fun. Since I am a novice, to say the least, we did walk and tölt. However, I did throw in some leg yields, which surprised Lala. We did a Zoom chat (more new stuff to learn!), and she gave me feedback on my video.

I was very pleased with my feedback. The experience was great—and I had a blast. Lilla learned a lot of new things, and I learned even more. I found it a pleasure to meet Lala. I was almost glad we had had to stay at home (almost). As they say, I made lemonade out of lemons. If you ever get a chance to enroll in this course, it is definitely worth your consideration. It was a great course, and I am really glad I took it.

Getting into the Icelandic horse world has been the best! I have met so many fantastic people. I cannot say how fortunate I feel having met so many wonderful people: Colleen McCafferty, who gave me my first referral to Icelandic horses; Ron Hoover, who provided more referrals; Carrie Brandt who has helped train me and my horse; Kerstin Lundgren, who introduced me to the Sirius KY OH Icelandic Horse Club; Virginia Lauridsen, who sold me an angel named Lilla; and now Laura Benson, who taught me that dressage can be fun.

ASK GUDMAR

by Sandie Weaver

“Ask Guðmar” is an online training program taught by world-renowned Icelandic horse trainer Guðmar Pétursson. It’s \$29 a month, payable by automatic credit card payments. Access is through the Facebook page “Ask Gudmar.” It doesn’t matter whether you are a beginner or an advanced rider, or if your horse is young or old, the training techniques apply to everyone.

Every Friday Guðmar posts a 20-30-minute video of him demonstrating a specific lesson. Participants have three days to work on the lesson with their horses and to share their training updates if they wish. The following Monday Guðmar hosts a half hour (or longer) Facebook Live session, where he clarifies any points he feels he missed while filming and answers questions the participants have about the training. The times for our Monday sessions alternate between morning and evening, since the group includes members in Germany, Iceland, and the American West. But participants who cannot join the sessions live can access them at a later time. All of Guðmar’s videos also remain on the Facebook page, so you can rewatch them as many times as you wish.

Topics Guðmar has covered so far include:

- 1) What’s good rein contact for the trained horse and how to accomplish it
- 2) First exercises for tölt training
- 3) Exercises to strengthen the hind end of the horse

- 4) Lateral work (in several videos)
- 5) Different seats for different gaits
- 6) How to properly ride and improve downward transitions
- 7) Topline control (also several videos)

It’s a very nice international group of Icelandic horse riders. I am so enjoying these sessions! When I go to the stables, the horses don’t know what’s going on out there in the world and they give me relief from this most agonizing time—personally, as I have family members at high risk, and for our country. I live in a very conservative town, and few people wear masks. I feel unsafe even at the stables, so I do not spend very long periods there, although I go every day.

The “Ask Guðmar” lessons have given me an opportunity to focus on something that I can work on to improve myself and to help my horses to be healthy and strong. As I watch the videos, I diligently take notes and then read them before I go to work with our three mares. Because I don’t feel very safe at the stables, I only work with the horses two or three times a week. I have access to two large arenas and a round pen. Sara (32) is retired, and she seemed to enjoy when I worked with her from the ground, walking next to her and asking her to lower her head to stretch her topline. It seems as if she felt she was actually being ridden. There was such a soft, happy expression in her eyes. That was a sweet experience. Thanks, Guðmar.



ÁLFADANS
EQUESTRIAN ARTS

“Do you have dreams of dancing with your horse at liberty? Alfadans Liberty School will show you how.”

ASK GUÐMAR

by Kathy Love

In 2018, I decided to retire from competition in the U.S. and concentrate on training a horse or two in Iceland with Guðmar Pétursson. The Winter Workshops experience at his farm, Hestaland, is quiet, comprehensive, and personalized and provides a chance to make new friends. I did this in 2019 and again in 2020—but at the end of February, I had to get out of Iceland fast before the travel ban came.

What now? Covid-19 has changed our lives in so many ways.

Since I couldn't visit Guðmar, I subscribed to his Facebook group "Ask Guðmar." The premise was to poll members for topics, and those with the

most votes would form the substance of each session. Thus we have reviewed and learned, through Guðmar's weekly video demonstrations, many basics and methods of achieving such things as topline control, groundwork, seat and rein aids, introducing tölt training, and more.

Guðmar posts a video each Friday, and the group meets online every Monday to discuss it and have questions answered. These live sessions are well attended and enjoyed by many subscribers. Guðmar is a good teacher and explains everything methodically and well.

As the pandemic dragged on and it seemed I couldn't go back to Iceland in 2020, I decided to focus on training two of my horses here in Kentucky.

Ástarljós from Pegasus Flughestar is

the daughter of my former mare, Salka frá Frostastöðum and Pegasus frá Skyggni. She is not yet seven years old, but with such good training from Carrie Brandt and Terral Hill at Taktur Icelandic, she has done well at bridleless riding and dressage. She's very four-gaited, very athletic, and would make a good endurance horse, as "she can trot forever," says Carrie. Her tölt training has been slow, and we were ready to push her to new levels.

Smári frá Tjarnalandi is a 14-year-old five-gaited stallion with a wonderful temperament, whom I co-own with Carrie. After a long break we are ready to rehab him back into competition form.

For this project, I enrolled in Guðmar's individual online coaching program. I can report good progress with both horses, and I believe that Carrie, as any trainer would, appreciated having Guðmar's input.

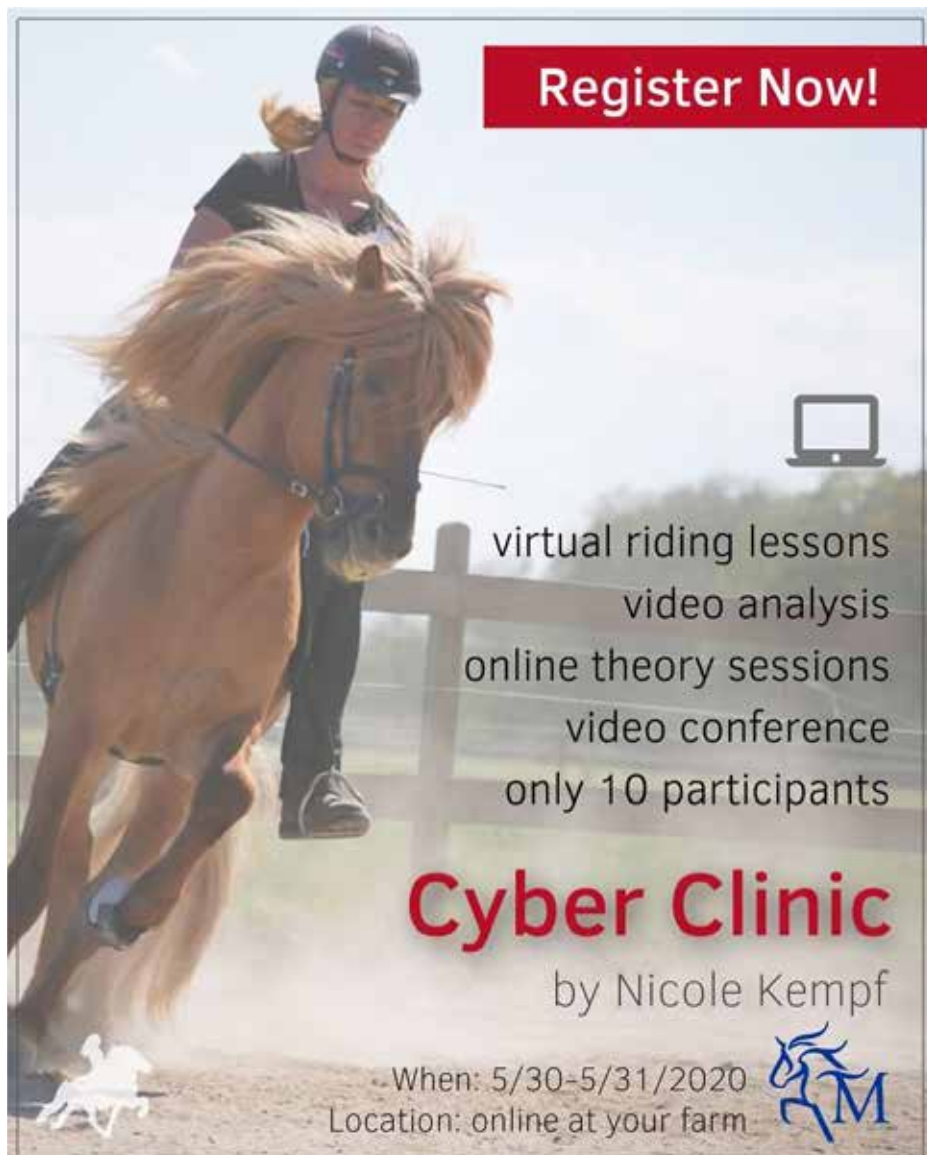
NICOLE'S CYBER CLINIC

by Julia Hutter

Editor's note: After Issue Two 2020 went to press, the Frida Icelandic Horse Club in the mid-Atlantic area sent around an announcement about Nicole Kempf's Cyber Clinic:

"Terrific opportunity to work with master trainer Nicole Kempf without needing a trailer! Additional dates and times will also be available if the May weekend doesn't work for you. You can use your one-on-one coaching to prepare for the USIHC 2020 Virtual Show or to work on any aspect of your equine partnership. Optional group feedback each day in addition to your actual lesson time will give you the possibility to interact with other participants if desired. Additional info will be posted on her website at www.nicolekempf.de."

A second announcement from Suzi McGraw provided more details: "Nicole has been providing remote training for her German students for several years, but is now expanding and offering this option to work with those of us who live in the United States. This training will be offered as real-time instruction (at mutually convenient times) or by comments on videos submitted by students. There is also the option for some group discussions/demos for those who are interested. Since in-person training isn't going to be an option for most of us in the near




Register Now!

virtual riding lessons
video analysis
online theory sessions
video conference
only 10 participants

Cyber Clinic
by Nicole Kempf

When: 5/30-5/31/2020
Location: online at your farm



"Nicole has provided remote training for her German students for several years. Now she's offering this option in the U.S."

“Balance the horse through classical exercises, while maintaining the spirit and freedom that characterizes Icelandic horsemanship.”

future this remote training can be an invaluable resource for us to continue learning and improving our partnership with our fabulous horses.”

Julia Hutter was one of several Frida Club members who took Nicole up on her offer.

Julia writes:

As our recent riding clinics with Nicole Kempf have had to be cancelled due to Covid-19, I looked for other means to connect, and Nicole has given me both online lessons and feedback on recorded videos.

Before our first live session, I sent her some videos to give her an idea how my horse Kongur and I were doing. She returned the videos with recorded comments, which was very helpful, as I could re-watch myself and understand what I was doing right and wrong. This allowed Nicole and me to have a common understanding about what the focus of our live lessons should be.

We then scheduled our first riding session at the Montaire arena, and she gave me live feedback on my riding. We had some initial technical difficulties, due to faulty Bluetooth earbuds, but we continued on speaker phone using Apple FaceTime. We worked on tölt, trot, and collection. She gave me some “homework” to work on when walking backwards and talked to me about the importance of release.

For the second lesson, I came prepared with technical upgrades (better wireless headphones) and additional practice, and we were able to go deeper into the work, improving our tölt and expanding into trot and canter. We have now continued to practice tölt speed changes and are doing frequent trot practice, as trot seems to be the hardest gait for Kongur with me.

In the meantime, Kongur has become calmer and so manageable that my 13-year-old daughter is starting to work with him too. I am looking forward to our next lesson, and on building confidence and skill with this beautiful horse. Thank you to Nicole, and to all in the Icelandic community who have supported us in so many ways.



GÆÐINGA DRESSAGE
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online course

Learn how to develop
your own training routine
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ALFADANS LIBERTY SCHOOL

by Tina Beck

Editor's note: On June 18, 2020, Alfadans Equestrian Arts posted good news on Facebook:

“Icelandics just keep winning in this year’s online liberty competition series! Our trainers Alex and Caeli each won their respective divisions of Bridleless Novice and Open Freestyle! In addition our friend Carrie Brandt at Taktur Icelandics won her divisions of Bridleless Distinguished and Novice Liberty. Our horses really do everything! Here is Caeli and Soldis’s winning freestyle program set to the song ‘In Harmony.’”

Soon afterward, Alfadans posted again:

“We have been floored by the response to Soldis’s freestyle liberty performance! Do you have dreams of dancing with your horse at liberty? Alfadans Liberty School will show you how we train our horses to do liberty work from the very beginning! The course is an online video series with an option for sending in video for feedback. You can sign up at any time, look through the videos at your

convenience and have access to them as long as you would like. Level 1 is up now and covers theoretical knowledge, leading at liberty, beginning liberty circles at the walk, spins, bowing, building blocks of yielding and drawing the front and hind ends, leg yielding away and towards, and treat manners. Level 2 is in the works!

Tina Beck was one of many Icelandic horse lovers who commented on the Facebook posts.

Tina writes:

I signed up for the Alfadans Liberty School and I could not be more happy! Caeli Cavanagh partners up with untrained Icelandics and shows, step by step, how to do the tricks. Don’t be fooled. The tricks are not just for fun. They help with the horse’s overall correct movement—smooth, rhythmic, and relaxed.

My flighty, oversensitive non-rideable Geisli did his very first liberty circle (okay, more like an oval) without a rope attached to his halter in an open area!

I am a beginner in every respect, yet I managed to keep Geisli calm and relaxed and with me. I’m super happy!

THE ROAD TO COLLECTION, PART 2

by Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir
illustrations by Margot Apple

What is true collection in tölt? It's like dancing. It's light and fun. There's no tension. It's effortless. You're one with your horse. He is stepping underneath you gracefully and moving his shoulders nicely. He feels light and soft in your hands. He is well muscled and using his body correctly, carrying his weight on his hind end—and you are not getting in his way. That's the ideal, at least.

This is my second article for the *Quarterly* based on a series of clinics I am giving in 2020 at my Solheimar Farm in Tunbridge, VT. These clinics combine my insights as a Centered Riding Level-2 instructor and an FT-certified Icelandic horse trainer with 35 years of experience. My ideology is deeply based on training the rider to become balanced and light in order to help the horse be his best.

I call these clinics “The Road to True Collection” because reaching collection for an Icelandic horse is a long process. If we ride in tölt, we're on that road. We're farther along with some horses, not as far along with others. We're not going to get to the end of the road—to true collection—by taking a few clinics. True collection takes years of effort. For many horses, true collection is not possible at all. But every horse can take steps along the road to true collection. Those steps teach the horse to carry himself in the correct way under saddle—the way that leads to a long and healthy life.

MIRROR IMAGES

In my first article (see Issue Two 2020 of the *Quarterly*), I explained how the horse's conformation and character affect his ability to learn collection. Let me give you a quick recap.

The ideal horse for collection is one with a long, supple neck that's thin at the throat. The shoulders are slanted enough to get a nice roundness in the neck. The neck flows into the back, which is broad and naturally muscled. The withers are high, so it isn't a lot of work to bring the shoulders up. The loins are soft, and the hind legs naturally come under the horse.



Icelandic rider Jakob Svavar Sigurðsson best illustrates what Sigrún calls “flow.” As he rides Skýr frá Skálakoti in tölt, she says, the horse's energy is “like a wave that flows through his body. There's no stopping it.” Photo by Iðunn Svansdóttir.

If your horse is missing any of these points of perfect conformation, collection will be more difficult for him.

Now say you have a horse with this perfect conformation, but it has a bad character. She's uncooperative, temperamental. He's not a worker. He won't push through the hard parts. Collection will be difficult for these horses too. The horse with the perfect character will work with you on suppling and strengthening exercises all day long—that's the champion. They can't all be the champion.

The ethical underpinning of our relationship to the horse is “patience, compassion, repetition, and understanding.” Before we set a goal on our road to collection, we have to decide what the horse is capable of. What is realistic to ask this horse to do?

In my last article, I also spoke a little about what the rider needs to be able to do, and I want to go into more detail about that here. Collection requires balance, relaxation, poise, suppleness, correct and effective placement of the rider's body parts,

and an understanding of the relationship between horse and rider.

Most of the time we're the problem. We don't let the horse do what he needs to do.

Let me tell you a story. I was competing on my stallion Parker frá Sólheimum once. He was getting competitive and wanted to really go in the canter. We were in a final, with other horses on the track, and I could feel him building up. I started thinking, “Oh, this is going to be a disaster. I'm going to run everybody over.” I started tensing. “Oh! This is going to be awful!” I was holding my breath and panicking in my head—and what am I doing to my body? And the horse is getting worse and worse... Finally I said, “Ah-hhh.” And he went, “Ah-hhh.” He was like, “Lady, you were killing me there.” I started breathing, and we got in harmony again.

The judge even noticed. She said, “Wow, I thought for a while things weren't going to end well. Then all of a sudden it was like, *pfff*.” It was like a balloon that got deflated. *Pfff*.

And it was all my fault. I don't care who

you are, what level rider you are, you can forget to breathe. Like this story tells.

The rider is a mirror image of the horse. I can get on your horse and tell where you, as a rider, are lacking. Who tells me? The horse.

IN BALANCE

In my last article, I described some classical dressage exercises I use to train collection. Most of them focus on isolating the horse's body parts. What does that mean?

I don't mean take a horse and dissect it like a frog. I mean move the shoulders this way and that way. Move the haunches this way and that way. The goal is suppleness. If the horse is not supple, then collection can't run through his entire body. If the horse is stiff anywhere, collection stops there.

What makes the horse stiff? Take Turn on the Haunches. For this exercise, the horse's hind end stays in the same place. The hind legs are moving up and down, but they're not moving out of place. The front end then pivots around the hind end.

Is this a natural move for the horse? Think about it. What do they do when they play? They get up on their hind legs. They swing around.

The key is, now we are on their backs and we are asking them to do this on cue. How does that affect things? It affects their balance.

It's really funny. Often when I start young horses under saddle, they don't even know they have a hind end. They think they're one single block and when you try to turn them, they almost fall over. Their feet get stuck to the ground. They don't really know how to maneuver. You have to show them that they still have a hind end. You have to bump them and say, "Hello!" You have to actually teach them that they can still move their feet around while you're sitting on their backs. You have to help them find their balance again.

But, as riders, we are often not balanced ourselves. We are often not correct in the way we sit on their backs. And unless we're correct, an exercise like Turn on the Haunches is going to be an extra-difficult thing for the horse, because the rider gets in the horse's way instead of helping him.

For example, I'm very right-handed. As a rider, I'm very handicapped by this one-sidedness. So I make myself practice things with my left hand, like brushing my teeth—even if I find it extremely awkward.

I make myself do things that feel foreign to me because I'm using my left side when I'd rather use my right. When I ride, I have to remind myself all the time: Left, left, left, left. I have to use my left as much as my right to ride correctly.

There are other physical things that prevent us from using our bodies correctly. Some of my students go to the chiropractor or have regular massages or do yoga or take lessons in the Alexander Technique. You need to do something so you can learn to access those body parts you don't ordinarily use outside of riding.

That's why I teach Centered Riding. We can understand the concepts of collection in our minds, but our bodies might not register them.

JUST FEEL

In Centered Riding, the first thing we do is to learn to feel, to get inside of ourselves. To let go of all the technique and just sit there and feel the horse moving us. Just feel. Too often, we forget to do that. We get caught up in our own heads, in thinking about riding, and we forget to feel the horse's body moving underneath us.

There have been several articles in the *Quarterly* on Centered Riding, so you may recognize the Four Basics: centering, breathing, soft eyes, and building blocks.

Here's how I think of them.

Centering is a way of staying in balance. When you get off balance, when you get uncentered, you have to get right back into it. I do this 100 times a day. Find my center. Drop my center into my seat. When you're on a horse, you have to keep centering yourself.

Breathing is key. You have to breathe yourself into your seat. You have to breathe your legs down. You have to breathe out the tension, as Parker told me.

You always want to have soft eyes—not focusing like a laser beam, but taking in everything around you and expanding your awareness.

Your body's building blocks need to be stacked like Legos: You put your legs down on the ground, your center on top of your legs, your shoulders on top of your center, your head on top of your shoulders. When those building blocks crumble, everything falls apart. So you need to keep checking: Are my building blocks still stacked correctly?

Recognizing our own bodies' strengths and weaknesses is an important step on the road to collection. The only way you will be able to move your horse's body parts around is if you know where all your own body parts are in space, and how to use them.

Let's go back to Turn on the Haunches. When we are isolating and moving a body



When we are isolating and moving a body part, like here, we need to use all our aids, not just our hands.

part—moving the shoulders around the haunches, like here—are we going to do it by just pulling on the rein and yanking the horse around?

No. We're going to use all our aids, not just our hands.

What are those aids? We have two seatbones, two legs, two thighs, two knees, two calves, two ankles, ten toes. We have two shoulders, two elbows, and one center. We have lots of aids.

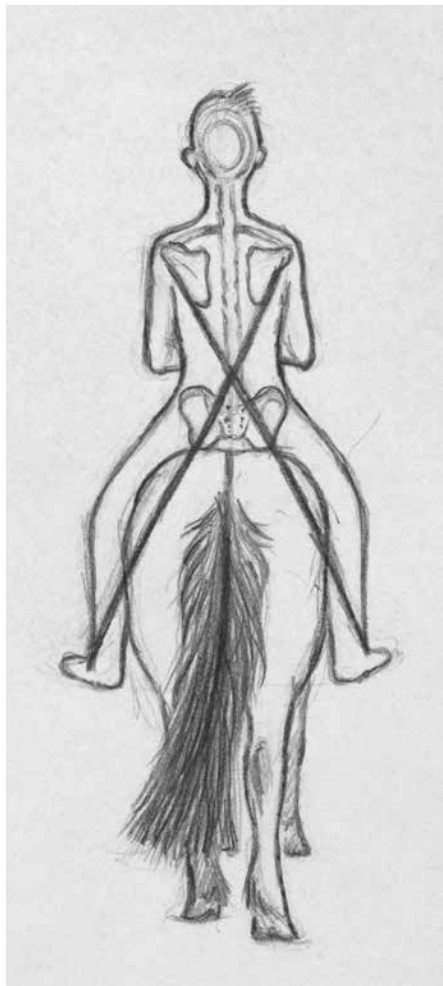
How do we use them all together so the exercise feels fluid? So it feels like we're not mechanically forcing the horse to move? Awareness and Practice.

We have get to where we are using our body in harmony with the horse. We have to learn to ride with our whole body.

RIDE ON THE X

One way I think of it is to ride on the X. I'm a big fan of the X—the two diagonal lines that go from your shoulderblades to the opposite seatbones and down your legs.

First, your legs should hang down from



As the horse's energy flows through your body, you control it by sending it through your imaginary X.

your hips. They should be like a blanket you drape onto the horse. They melt into the horse.

Now take the bottom of your right shoulderblade and drop it into your left seatbone, then drop that left seatbone into your left leg. Take the bottom of your left shoulderblade and drop it into your right seatbone, and then drop that right seatbone into your right leg.

That's your X. It's internal. Watching you ride, I shouldn't see you doing any of this. You're not dropping your frame—you should be riding on your skeleton, not with your muscles.

Now when the horse starts pulling on the reins, you don't pull back. They can't pull you if you're not pulling them. What you do instead is breathe, drop your center into your seat, and lift the reins up a little bit—while keeping your elbows bent and heavy and beside your hipbones. You just sit there and think about your X.

You let the pressure from your right hand flow up into your right shoulderblade, then flow diagonally across your back to your left seatbone and into your left leg and all the way to the ground.

You let the pressure from your left hand flow up into your left shoulderblade, then flow diagonally across your back to your right seatbone and into your right leg and all the way to the ground.

You cue your horse with your legs until she gives in and goes forward.

That doesn't mean she runs forward, because you have to take her hind end with you. Here's how to do that.

Imagine your seatbones have little suction cups on the bottom. Those suction cups are connected to the hind legs of the horse. Now imagine the energy flowing through your X in the other direction, forward. Use your right seatbone to suck onto and scoop up the horse's right hind leg and bring it up into your left shoulderblade and down into your left hand. Use your left seatbone to scoop up the horse's left hind leg and bring it up into your right shoulderblade and down into your right hand.

But don't let the flow stop there. The motion has to flow all the way from the horse's hind legs, through your body to the horse's mouth. If you lock your hand, the movement stops there. If you brace your wrists, the movement stops there. If you tense your biceps to hold up the reins, the movement stops there.

Have you ever seen the Icelandic champion Jakob Svavar Sigurdsson ride? If not, take a few minutes to watch this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9aQZ2y_ycc (posted February 17, 2018 by Hestafrettir)

You will see this flow best in him. It's like a wave that flows through his body. There's no stopping it.

THE RELEASE

A really important piece of being a supple rider like Jakob is to follow the natural movements of the horse's neck. When the horse wants to lengthen his neck as he moves, we go with him—but we don't just hand him the reins. We don't brace against his movement, either. We simply remind him where the boundary is.

How do we remind him? Again, we're going to use all our aids, not just our hands.

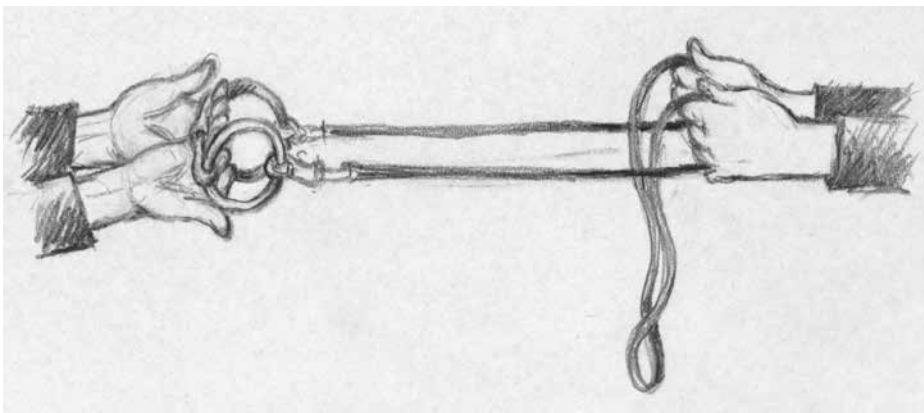
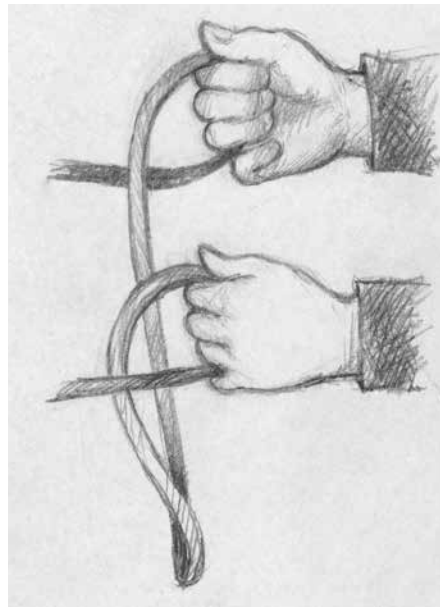
Let's return to that exercise I wrote about in my last article, where one person plays the rider, holding the reins, and the other person pretends to be the horse, holding the bit in two hands and providing feedback to the rider.

I teach my riders to hold the reins so that their thumbs are on top, pressing down firmly and making little tents. The reins should slide all the way in between their ring finger and their pinkie, so it touches the webbing of the hand. That way the thumbs keep the horse from taking more rein, while the fingers can close to say "No," and open, to give a release and tell the horse "Thank you."

If you and a partner are trying this exercise at home, make sure you trade places so each of you can feel what the horse feels when you simply close and open your fingers. It's subtle, but if you're holding the bit, you'll feel the release. Closed, it feels pretty tight, because I'm saying "no"—and I will also be driving the horse forward with my leg. Then I open. I do nothing else. I don't change my hand position at all. My hands stay right where they were. All I do is close and open my fingers and that is enough. It's a huge difference for the horse.

But it's not the whole release. The release doesn't just come from my hands. The release comes from between my shoulderblades. If you put your hand on a rider's back—when we're practicing in a chair, it's easy—you should feel movement there, right between the shoulderblades.

Imagine that you have a big snap on



What does the horse feel? Get a partner and remind yourself with this exercise: The rider's thumbs keep the horse from taking more rein, while the fingers close to say "No," and open to say "Thank you." It's subtle, but if you're holding the bit, you'll feel the release.

the back of your jacket, and you've snapped your reins on there, right between your shoulderblades. These reins are bungee cords. They're firm, but elastic. They run from the middle of your back all the way down your sleeves to your fingers. When you give a release, don't think about it coming from your fingers, think about it coming from that snap in the middle of your back.

Have you ever finished a ride and your shoulders are sore? Then you're holding between your shoulderblades, you're bracing against the horse's motion. You haven't actually released for the whole ride.

I used to get sore shoulders all the time when I was riding, and I had to ask myself, "What are you doing?" Or when I'm cold and I hunch my shoulders, I forget to release the muscles in my back. I have to remind myself to think about where the

release comes from. If I start feeling my shoulders go sore, I remind myself to relax. Centered Riding has helped me tremendously with many things. The soreness in my shoulders has decreased tremendously since I started being aware of my body and learning how to use my body correctly.

It's easy to sit in a chair and go, "I can feel it!" Then when you get on your horse and everything is happening at once, you're like, "I'm not feeling anything." So we always need to take a moment when we're on our horses and stop and feel and just access all this.

It's not easy. I can feel it really well on my right side, but on my left side I don't feel it as well. If I drop my shoulderblades, I can feel it better. So I have to remember to drop my shoulderblades.

Now when I get on my horse, I shake loose. I relax. I breathe out. I gather up my

reins and access my shoulderblades. I let my horse walk, and I take up a light rein contact, following his movement. I follow and just feel—wait, I feel more tension on one side, so I release that hand. I go inside myself for a few steps and just feel how I'm riding. When I'm even and balanced and supple, then I'm ready to ask for collection.

THE BOX

Let's say we've done our dressage exercises and our horse is supple. Let's say we've learned to use all our aids when we ride, and our own bodies are supple, too. We're in harmony with our horse.

To create collection, we're going to contain the horse inside what I call the "box." We put the horse "in the box," inside these four imaginary walls. All four feet have to stay inside these walls. That means, essentially, that the horse has to stay within our aids.

When I get a new horse in for training, and I'm starting to create the box, I put my legs here, and I say, "You're not going to run into my legs. You're going to stay inside my legs." I put my reins here, and I say, "You're not going to run through the reins to the side or dive forward, you're going to stay with me."

Now is this box rigid? No. It's an imaginary box, and it's the right size for the horse to feel comfortable in, not claustrophobic. In the beginning, it's a bigger box. As the horse starts to understand the idea of collection and can physically carry more weight on his hind end, we can make the box smaller.

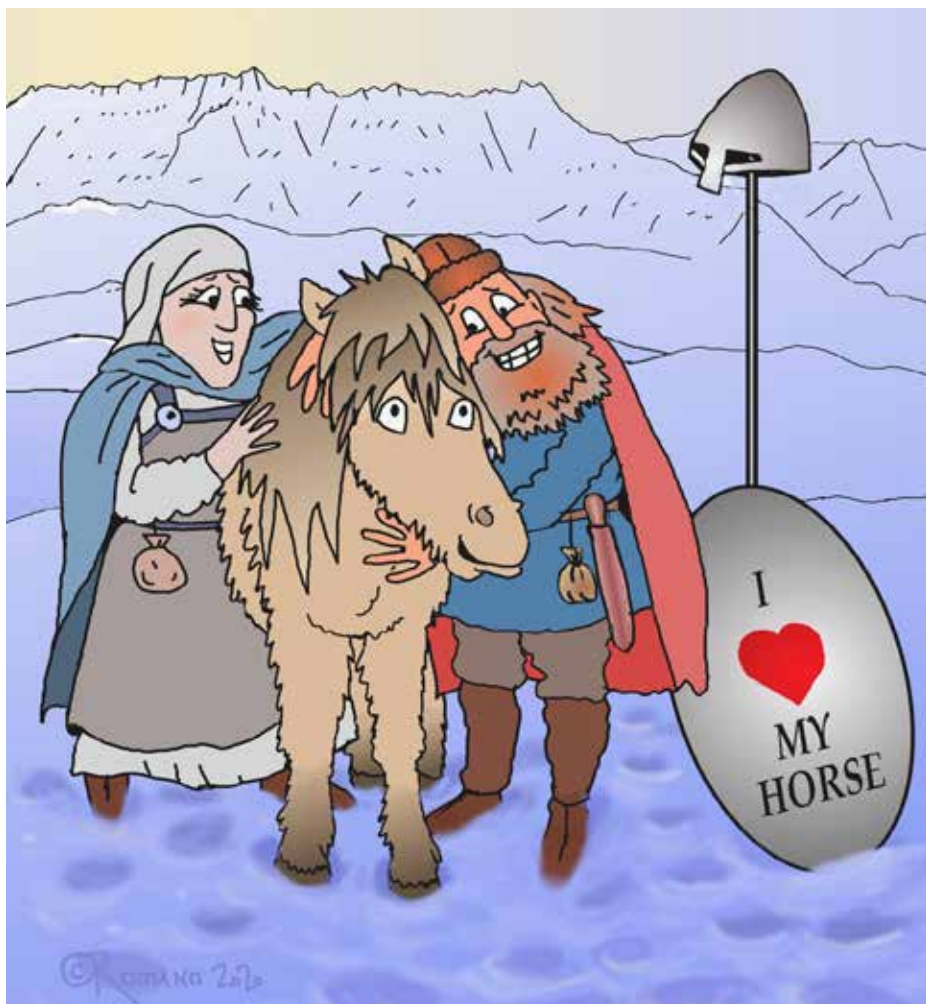
How do I make the horse feel comfortable inside a little box? Even though I'm saying "No, stay in the box," I'm supple and elastic. I'm not bracing anywhere. I allow him to stretch his neck and lift his back and get his hind end to come under and lengthen his whole body.

Remember that first, it's all about us. It doesn't matter what we want to do with our horse, we first have to work on our own bodies. Before we can even begin down the road to collection, we have to be one with our horse. The key is suppleness in our own bodies and being aware of our own strengths and weaknesses.

How far down the Road to True Collection we travel depends on what our horse can do—physically and mentally—and on how well we, the rider, use our body in harmony with our horse.

HARD HISTORY

by Chris Romano



Please give three cheers to the USIHC board of directors for voting to review the Congress's policies on discrimination and harassment (see their announcement from June 12 in the sidebar). By doing so, the Board is making sure our organization is egalitarian and safe, as we engage with the outside world and with each other in the ring, on the track, on the trail, or around the stables.

The Icelandic horse, like all breeds of horse, has a long and hard history—and history is often tweaked to immortalize, blur, sanitize, or erase what is deemed unpalatable to those in power.

When I was in school 60 years ago, for example, the Civil War confederate general Robert E. Lee and his horse, Traveler, were adulated in a children's book.

Westerns—whether books, movies, or radio or TV shows—may have encouraged many of us to love horses and want

to ride the trails, but they often depicted the dehumanization and slaughter of Native Americans and Hispanic peoples as a routine, necessary, business matter. The Lone Ranger, featuring the beautiful white stallion, Silver, was based on a Zane Gray novel about the first Texas Ranger. Recent research on the Texas Rangers has revealed a brutal and racist organization that rode around collecting runaway slaves and later terrorized border towns during the Mexican American War.

There's much more, of course.

VIKINGS & SLAVERY

How can this possibly relate to us riding our Icelandic horses? Well, do you have fun dressing up and imagining riding like the Vikings did over a thousand years ago?

It is fun—and I'm not saying you should stop. But when you do dress up as a Viking, try to keep real history in the back

of your mind. The Vikings have a terrible history of raiding, terrorizing, murder, and slavery. Even after trading replaced raiding in the North, slavery continued to exist.

But—and most people don't know this—the Vikings themselves were not racists. And they weren't all blond Scandinavians.

When I discussed the topic of this essay with the *Quarterly* editor, Viking historian Nancy Marie Brown, she explained, "In fact, as we are finding out in the most recent research on Viking warriors, the Vikings accepted people of all colors and creeds and sexes into their warbands and terrorized people of every type. They were equal-opportunity terrorists! In my forthcoming book, *The Real Valkyrie*, I note that in the tenth century, the Norse—meaning all Scandinavians—fought on both sides in most battles in the British Isles, and their warbands included not only Irish, English, Scottish, and Welsh fighters, but those from the far reaches of the Baltic Sea, from Russia, Saxony, and France, even from Spain or Africa. Skin color in humans was like coat color in horses: An exotic color made an otherwise excellent horse more marketable; outside the marketplace, it made no difference at all."

The Vikings also did not treat their slaves the way Americans did, Nancy continued. "Viking warriors captured in battle were often sold as slaves. But slaves who could fight could win their freedom. They also had opportunities to work for pay and eventually save enough to buy their freedom. Some of the most famous Vikings, including King Olaf Tryggvason of Norway, were slaves for part of their lives. In the Viking Age, being a slave was a role you could move into and move out of. It was not a definition of you as an inferior being."

VIKINGS & NAZIS

Unfortunately, that's not the view most people have of Vikings.

"Pseudospeciation" is a term describing the false premise under which different cultures and peoples are thought of as

different species. In the 19th century, Norse mythology, as preserved in the Icelandic sagas and Eddas, was Germanized. In the 20th century, the Nazis utilized this adulterated mythology in propaganda that glorified war, blondness, and the superiority of an invented white, Aryan race meant to rule over all the world's peoples.

This idea didn't go away when World War II ended. In the last few years white-supremacist hate groups, such as the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) in Scandinavia, have begun using Viking runes and Norse mythology in their propaganda. As filmmaker Nicholas Ahlmark writes, "As a result of the NRM's association with Viking symbols, the average member of the Swedish public, who knows nothing about fact-based Viking enthusiasts, now categorizes this community in the same box as neo-Nazis and white supremacists. Thus, if you have a visible Viking tattoo, you may get doubletakes walking down the street from members of the public who think that must mean you are also a fan of Hitler."

That's in Sweden—and people in the U.S. know even less about true Viking history. So, as we play at being Vikings, keep in mind how other people might view our actions as being related to neo-Nazis and white supremacists. Keep it in mind because you love your Icelandic horse and want the best for the community that helped create and supports your horse.

HORSES & SLAVERY

Racism is where Viking history, American slavery, and horses intersect.

In the U.S., horses have long been



When Brianna Noble rode in the Oakland protests, her presence and dignity helped erase the U.S. stereotype of "the horseman."

used to oppress marginalized and enslaved people. Pre-Civil War slave-holding states had mandatory mounted patrols, who rode out to control the enslaved and, with the aid of bloodhounds, to capture runaways. These patrols influenced the creation of the first police departments. Elements of these beginnings are embedded in police departments to this day.

As you might imagine, seeing police and other officials on horseback means different things to different people.

Be happy to know that a more multicultural view of horseback riding in the U.S. has been growing. During the Oakland protests over the death of George Floyd at the hands of police, one woman got on her horse and showed the world a new vision: a black woman on a well trained and well loved horse.

Brianna Noble runs Mulatto Meadows in the San Francisco Bay Area. Brianna drove her horse trailer into Oakland and rode down the streets, gathering peaceful protesters along the way. She rode alone, with no other riders. She rode with strong presence and dignity. In this one ride, she helped erase the U.S. stereotype of "the horseman": the big, white man, armed with a gun (or battle ax) riding a horse.

For Icelandic horse lovers, it's important to know Icelandic and U.S. horse-related history—even the despicable parts. Both people and horses have had a hard time getting to now. It can be tough to read inclusive, accurate histories that show the cruel use of horses for the purpose of oppression. But when you love your horse enough, you'll want to know how horses have often been considered as mere utilitarian objects, rather than as the beautiful living beings they are.

So, again, my thanks to the USIHC Board and to our members for all their efforts to root out possible discrimination in our organization.

FURTHER READING

On slavery and its legacy, see Douglas A. Blackman, *Slavery by Another Name*.

On the Texas Rangers, see Doug Swanson, *Cult of Glory*.

On the Nazi's use of Vikings, see Nancy Marie Brown's *Song of the Vikings*.

On modern attempts to counteract the neo-Nazis' appropriation of Viking symbols, see Nicholas Ahlmark, [https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/witness/2020/03/vikings-neo-nazis-battling-swe-](https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/witness/2020/03/vikings-neo-nazis-battling-swe)

den-200319123918169.html

On the Vikings as anti-racists, see Clare Downham, <https://theconversation.com/vikings-were-never-the-pure-bred-master-race-white-supremacists-like-to-portray-84455>

On Brianna Noble, see <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/The-woman-who-rode-her-horse-through-an-Oakland-15318709.php>

I also recommend Robert M. Sapolsky, *Behave: The Biology of Humans at our Best and Worst*.



FROM THE BOARD

During this difficult time, the USIHC board of directors wishes to affirm to the membership our commitment to not tolerating any form of discrimination based on sex, gender, race, disability, religion or sexual orientation within the Icelandic horse community. In an effort to foster a welcoming community and contribute to long-term improvement and growth, all USIHC board of directors are taking the following actions:

1. Adding a non-discrimination and anti-harassment policy to the USIHC Board of Directors Code of Conduct.
2. Yearly participation in Diversity and Implicit Bias training.
3. Reviewing breeding, sport, and other USIHC documents and adding non-discrimination policies where necessary

The USIHC Mission is to promote the knowledge of the Icelandic horse within the United States and its correct use as a competition and riding horse. This can only be achieved by holding ourselves accountable, working towards progress, and growing the community through inclusion and diversity.

WHEN PLANS GO AWRY

by Alys Culhane

Last February I began to sense that it was going to be a different sort of summer, trip-wise. I'd just attended a Centered Riding clinic in Washington, and was spending a few days in Oregon with my sister, when we learned that several cases of a new coronavirus had been diagnosed in Washington and Oregon. I was to fly back to Alaska the next day. Masks and hand sanitizer were already in short supply. I prepared for the plane flight by tying a coffee filter over my face with cheesecloth.

I dodged the bullet, so to speak—Alaska's quarantine went into effect a few days after I returned home.

But my summer plans fell by the wayside. The U.S.-Canada border closed, so my husband, Pete, and I cancelled our Lower 48 horseback-riding trek. I decided to forego my August trip to the east coast and a September trip to ride horses in Iceland. It just wasn't worth risking becoming sick just because I had the travel bug.

I was now home-based. I decided that I could either spiral up and make the best of the situation, or I could spiral down and become a couch potato. I chose the former, by adhering to a rigorous exercise program. My days soon began with my "attending" morning Zoom yoga classes. After, I got outside and alternated days of cross-country skiing and fat-tire bicycling. When finally the roads were ice-free, I began riding my road bicycle, slowly increasing the distance.

Come April, I decided to do an in-state trip, so as to avoid having to spend my summer weeding Pete's gardens and orchard. I'd travel across Alaska from more northerly Fairbanks to more southerly Valdez by bicycle and horseback, a distance of approximately 600 miles. Our place in Palmer would be the midway point. Pete agreed to this because I'd then be able to take a few days off and assist him in caring for the animals and the garden.

Pete's nonchalant attitude about my proposed trip was in character, given the fact that I'm an experienced long distance bicyclist. I'd previously done two solo east-to-west trips across the continental U.S. and one solo north-to-south trip, the latter on the Great Divide Bicycle Route. I'd also done numerous bicycle tours with Pete.



Sarah Gotshall rides Alys's Hrimmi over busy Hatcher Pass on a hot (for Alaska) June day. Photo by Claudia Sihler.

I took off my bicycling helmet and put on my horseback riding helmet in 2004, when a suppressed interest in horses resurfaced. Now my suppressed interest in bicycle touring had resurfaced.

THE PARKS HIGHWAY

I embarked on the first leg of my trip—Fairbanks to the Hatcher Pass Turnoff Road—on June 18, 2020. A friend dropped me off in Fairbanks, where I stayed with the Bundtzens, who are also Icelandic horse owners and USIHC members. It was hard leaving their summer homestead, because it was raining hard. As Fran Bundtzen later told me, there

were record amounts of rainfall over the next three days. Alone with my trusty iron horse, Trek from Squalor Holler, I dealt with rain, headwinds, and heavy truck traffic. Places to camp were few and far between, so I had no choice but to average 50 or so miles a day.

The high point of this portion of my journey was getting a ride in a pilot car through five or so miles of road construction. I asked for, and was given, bottled water. I poured the liquid into my container and was told by the double-masked flag woman not to toss the bottle into the back of the truck, but rather to take it with me—this being a Covid-19 precaution.

The sun came out on the fourth day of my trek. Within hours, I was wishing for rain again, because I now had a blistered lower lip. Day Five I arrived, late afternoon, at my first destination. The second portion of my journey was to be on horseback. I was to meet Pete on the outskirts of Willow, 14 miles down the Hatcher Pass Turnoff Road. This way, I'd avoid having to continue on the soon-to-be-heavily trafficked and not very scenic portion of the Parks Highway. Pete had agreed to trailer my Icelandic horse Rauðhetta (aka Raudi) to my roadside campsite. I'd then ride 17 miles over the pass. He'd pick her up on the far side, and I'd bicycle from there home.

I arrived at the Turnoff Road two days earlier than scheduled. I called Pete and explained that I now had two options: I could bicycle over the pass and bicycle home, or he could come and pick me up. "My decision," I added, "will be weather dependent."

I headed up the road and set up camp. That night it began raining again. I'm not talking a warm, light drizzle, but rather a cold, heavy rain—the sort that chills to the bone. I packed up my gear and rode back to the turnaround, where I again called Pete and told him to come and give me a lift home.

HATCHER PASS

My new plan was this: I'd have Pete take me back to the base of Hatcher Pass when the weather cleared. In the meantime, I'd attempt to recruit friends to join me on this portion of my ride, for, while I'm used to bicycling solo, the prospect of riding horseback solo no longer appealed to me. This involved considerable negotiation, but finally USIHC member Claudia Sihler agreed to accompany me on her Icelandic mare, Katla, and my friend Sarah Gotshall agreed to accompany me on one of our other Icelandic horses, Hrimfara.

Two days later, Pete trailered us all to the base of the pass. We all wore masks and had hand sanitizer on hand. Before, during, and after the ride, we kept our distance from one another. We all repeatedly remarked how strange this was, given that we've been trail riding buddies for many years. I wore a mask for the duration of our ride, because my lower lip was now quite blistered and painful to the touch.

The sun was shining brightly as we

three set out, in a rather Hobbit-like fashion. The Hatcher Pass Road is usually only open July 1 to October 1, because of the high snow pack, but this year the Alaska Department of Transportation opened it on June 15. Given that there was to be some traffic, we three opted to do our traverse on the Wednesday before the Fourth of July, in hopes of beating the holiday rush. This seemed a wise decision, as the bulk of the traffic would consist of in-state tourists who were out for a leisurely drive.

The first part of the dirt-and-gravel road is winding and gradual. Our three red-headed mares moved out at a fast trot, with Raudi taking the lead. A mile out, I heard the unmistakable rumble of a large vehicle. I glanced back and saw a semi with a bulldozer on the rear. "Expletive! Expletive!" I shouted. Sarah and Claudia pulled over to the side of the road, and their horses dived for the grass. Raudi, who was in front, bolted. I did as I'd done many years ago, when faced with the same situation going over Cottonwood Pass in Colorado—I simply rode it out. Like then, Raudi quickly figured out that there was no place to go but up, and soon slowed to a trot. I did an emergency dismount and led her over to the grass. The driver waved as the vehicle lurched by.

I didn't have time to ask my riding partners the question that immediately came to mind—which was, How much of this sort of thing are we going to have to deal with?—for a side-loading dump truck

followed on the heels of the semi. And after that, another semi, identical to the first, ground past.

We regrouped after the construction parade passed. Sarah noticed that Raudi's rear boot had come partway off. Claudia held Raudi as I refitted it. I hopped back in the saddle. I was beset with a sinking feeling as Raudi appeared to have a hitch in her get-a-long. The sensation was like that of being on a bicycle and having a flat tire. I dismounted and walked her a few steps. Yep, she was favoring her left rear leg. Sarah said that we should call Pete and have him come and pick us up.

"Let's check the boot," Claudia said. I held Raudi's lead in my now trembling hands. Claudia removed the boot, felt inside, and pulled forth a giant pebble. This indeed turned out to be the culprit. I breathed a sigh of relief, because Raudi, who has always been the apple of my eye, was okay.

TOP OF THE WORLD

There is only one word to describe the remaining six hours of our ride: magical. We were literally on top of the world. Our backdrop was snow-splotched mountains, and our foreground was the tundra. Marmots appeared here and there and chattered at us before ducking back into their holes.

Clouds rolled in during the day. My fear that we might get rained on proved to be unfounded. That afternoon we arrived



Alys on Raudi and Sarah on Hrimmi passing the snowpack on their way up and over Hatcher Pass. It might be June, but it's still Alaska. Photo by Claudia Sihler.



Alys on Raudi (left) and Claudia Sihler on Katla take a break at beautiful Summit Lake. Photo by Sarah Gotshall.

at Summit Lake, the literal high point of our trek. The ice at the lake edges had melted: The reflection was a mirror image of the surrounding peaks. The lower splotches of snow actually had a pink hue, due to a specific kind of high-country algae.

We observed that the two dozen or so hikers, bicyclists, and tourists in the pullout area were all wearing masks. I was reminded of the time when Pete and I arrived at the top of the Vail Ski Slope in

Colorado. We then were surrounded by tourists intrigued by the sight of our “cute little ponies.” The tourists now kept their distance, of course, because of Covid-19 concerns.

We three walked our mounts down the far side of the pass, in order to give them a much-needed break. I was the first to see our trailer a mile down the winding road. I was elated, because the logistically most tricky portion of my journey was over. We loaded horses and gear into the trailer, and I unloaded Trek from Squalor Holler from the back of the truck. The others hopped into the truck and headed home. I spent the night at an Alaska State Parks Campground, then the next day bicycled home, a distance of 40 miles. This was the midway point of my trip.

I will, in the next few days, leave home again and horseback-ride a distance of 20 miles or so to Sutton. I will then get on the Glenn Highway and resume riding my bicycle. My final destination, which is Valdez, is 300 miles distant.

I suspect that I’ll always feel a sense of dismay when I think about having to abandon my proposed 2020 travel plans. However, I will most likely give myself a pat on the back for having acted upon an equally challenging option, one that enabled me to see more of my home state of Alaska and, in part, spend time with my horses and horse-riding friends.

At ride’s end Sarah Gotshall meets Alys’s new puppy, Shadow, while Alys and Claudia Sihler rehash what went awry—and right—on their mountain ride. Photo by Pete Praetorius.



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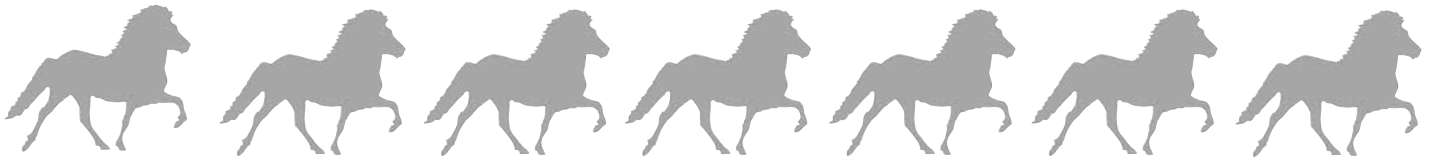


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