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## IBEM Newsletter

Issue 2, October, 2008

It wasn't very long ago, we received a lot of rain and many a paddock was under water or at least quite wet. Mother Nature demonstrated us what can be achieved when we are dealing with elastic and hydrated hoof capsules; hooves can function better, they de-contract and head towards a more healthy form. However, especially in Canterbury, this joy can be over very quickly. Like the old saying, from Flood to Drought in 2 weeks, the hooves can dry out quite quickly, too. Assisted by the Nor'wester, the ground dries out and the mud turns from a moisture providing substance into a moisture absorbing mass.

The bottom line is that the hooves lose their elasticity and ability to progress towards a healthier hoof shape. Please keep this in mind. To what degree this drying out occurs varies from region to region, sometimes even from property to property. This elasticity is needed if you want your horse's hooves to progress further. Unless you want to wait another year, until the rain sets in, now starts the time where you need to put the hooves in water – yes a hoof bath. I like to see the periople horn saturated at least once per day. The periople horn is the one that covers the coronet and looks “grey and fleshy” when saturated with water. Generally this takes 20-40 minutes to occur. If your ground, dew, or rain achieves this, that's fine, if not, you need to get into soaking mode.

On the Barefoot journey with our horse, many of us have asked the question: Are we still Barefoot if we use hoof boots? The answer is not a simple yes or no, however.

In the Transitioning phase the unhealthy hoof, stimulated through movement and a style of trimming that restores hoof function, will change to a healthy situation and grow stronger. Often, at the start the hooves display flare in the hoof wall, underslung heels, bars that are long and pushed forward over the sole, distorted/curved coronet, thin soles, poor concavity, and contracted heels. All these symptoms are the result of incorrect lever forces acting on the hoof, causing distortion and reduced horn quality and quantity. A hoof like this is weak and not able to withstand much work. While correct trimming aims to remove those lever forces, the horse needs time to heal and grow a healthy hoof. In response, the horse moves carefully and sensitively over slightly rough or lumpy terrain. The horse often chooses a toe-first landing over the desired heel-first landing as seen in a sound horse. These incorrect impact forces have negative effects, directly, to the hoof suspension and, peripherally, to muscles that get used unnaturally which add to the horse's discomfort.

Properly fitted hoof boots create a firm but yielding environment with no lumps and bumps that can cause excess pressure to the transitioning hoof. The horse quickly gains confidence in putting the foot down and using it correctly. As a result, you get a happier horse that moves more correctly and therefore transitions to a healthier hoof a lot faster. You also get a happier horse owner who now will ride the horse more often, and the increased movement will also speed up the Transition to Barefoot. At the end of the Transitioning phase we have a horse that has developed healthy hooves and is sound on the terrain it lives on.