Issue Three

2022

THE ICELANDIC HORSE

QUARTERLY

Official Publication of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress

Member Association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations)

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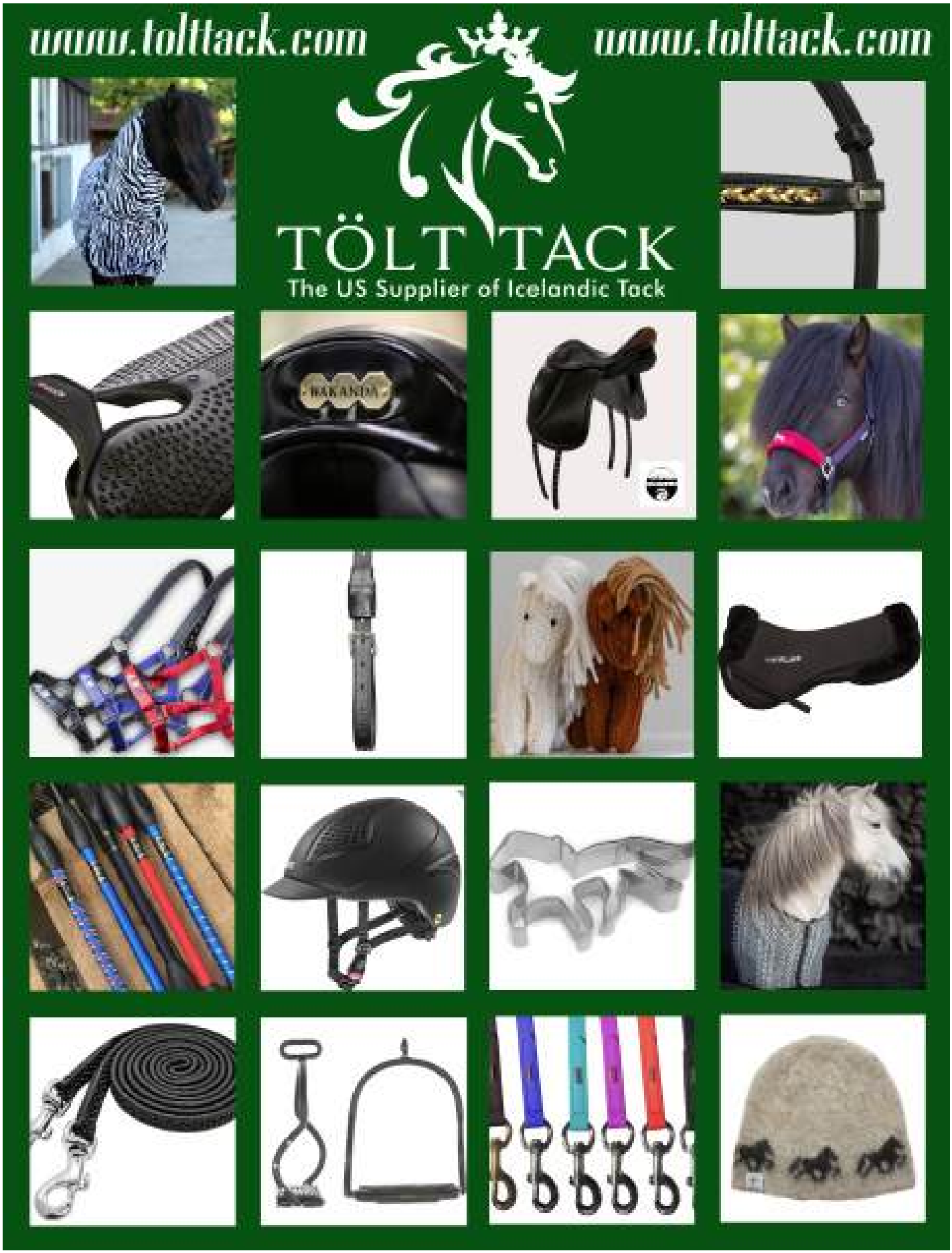
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QUARTERLY

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Issue Three 2022

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

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On the cover: "Riding the Dragon," by photographer Ona Kwiatkowski. When Ona first saw Carrie Lyons-Brandt and Vaskur frá Kagaðarhóli at the 2022 NEIHC Open Show, she was in awe: "Vaskur was full of spirit. His actions were sharp and strong. He was magnificent, and I couldn't take my camera off him. I set my sights on capturing them in action—and I did! I captured the fire and connection of a woman and her horse."

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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.

Will Covert

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 14 affiliated clubs: 13 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."

NEW SPORT JUDGES

Tamangur Icelandics in Colorado hosted FEIF International Sport Judge Þorgeir Guðlaugsson for a four-day sport judging seminar June 2-5. "The seminar was a great success," reports USIHC Vice President Jeff Rose, "with eight attendees and two newly-minted USIHC-qualified Sport B Judges.

Congratulations to Paetra Hennigar and Coralie Denmeade for passing the examination and earning the rank of USIHC Sport B Judge, and to Alexandra Montan Gray for being certified as a USIHC Sport B Judge based on her qualifications from the Swedish Icelandic horse affiliate, Svenska Islandshastforbundet.

This seminar utilized an improved format, including a pre-seminar meeting via Zoom, hosted by Alex Pregitzer, to help attendees prepare. The seminar included a day of theory, a day of practical judging via video, the in-person judging of a schooling show, an oral examination on theory, and a practical examination judging competition videos.

"As always, Þorgeir's passion for the Icelandic horse, detailed instruction, commitment to horse welfare, and desire to see people succeed permeated throughout the four-day seminar," Jeff notes. Many thanks to Þorgeir for coming to Colorado from the Netherlands to teach, Alex Montan Gray for helping Þorgeir as the Second Examiner, Alex Pregitzer for her pre-seminar course, and Tamangur Icelandics for hosting this great event.

FEIF International Sport Judge Þorgeir Guðlaugsson awards a winning ribbon at the CIA Spring Show at Flying C Ranch in May. Þorgeir also led the Judging Seminar in June. Photo by Will Covert

"Adding three judges to our roster of USIHC sport judges is a tremendous leap," adds Sport Committee chair Martin Nielsen, "and it means a lot to the USIHC to have well-trained and experienced judges available for our shows."

Learn more at https://icelandics.org/sport-judges

VIRTUAL SHOWS

The 2022 Virtual Spring Show had 84 entries and 46 horse/rider combinations. Both National Ranking and Fun Classes were offered, as well as Division Championships. The show featured five judges: Nicolai Thye and Sophie Kovac (FEIF International Judges), Freija Thye (US

Congratulations to our three new USIHC Sport B Judges (left to right): Alexandra Montan Gray, Coralie Denmeade, and Paetra Hennigar.

Sport Judge A), and Alex Pregitzer and Jana Meyer (US Sport Judges B). Results were posted on June 21 at https://icelandics.org/blog/2022-usihc-virtual-spring-show-results-and-videos.

Registration for the USIHC Virtual Fall Show closes on November 4, 2022 at 9:00 pm EST. Videos can be made anytime between May 21 and November 11, and must be submitted by November 11, 2022 at 9:00 pm EST. Learn more at https://icelandics.org/virtualshow/

As reported by Martin Nielsen in the June Board Meeting Minutes, there have been multiple issues with the use of IceTest for the Virtual Shows. "A ransomware hack required a major effort by Doug Smith and Lutz Lesener, taking IceTest offline and recreating all the lost data on an intermediary server. They got it back up and running, but it was still acting up for a while and it took a while to get all the marks from all the judges in the database. A few had to be re-entered manually." Additional flaws in the system are still being worked out.

SHOW SEASON

Looking ahead, two shows are scheduled at Solheimer Icelandics in Tunbridge, VT (August 27-28 and October 15-16). It was held April 30-May 1 at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA. The Flugnirkeppni Show was held June 11-12 at Tolthaven Icelandics in Pelican Rapids, MN. The NEIHC Open was held June 18-19 at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY. Scores can be found at https://icelandics.org/national-ranking-show-results.

Looking ahead, three shows were scheduled at Solheimar Icelandics in Tunbridge, VT (July 23-24, August 20-21, and October 15-16). The Toppur Annual Sport Horse Show will be at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, IA (September 3-4). The National Ranking AIHA Show will be held at Arctic Arrow Farm, Wasilla AK (September 17-18). The Ice Championships Triple World Ranking Shows will be at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY (September 30-October 2). The Montaire Fall Classic will be at Montaire Icelandic Horses in Middleburg, VA (October 22-23). Finally, the Five-Gait Fall Open is planned for the Oregon Horse Center (November 5-6), and a CIA Open Fall Show is expected to be scheduled. Watch https://icelandics.org/events/ for information.

TRAINERS

This summer the USIHC offered fast-track testing for eligible participants who wanted to earn their FEIF Level I Trainer or USIHC Basic Instructor certification. "Our goal with this program," explained Virginia Lauridsen, "is to support and elevate Icelandic horse trainers and instructors here in the United States." The exams took place August 31-September 2 at Harmony Icelandics in Peru, IA. Learn more at https://icelandics.org/usihc-fast-track-testing.

YOUTH PENPALS

The USIHC's new Penpal Program has been launched. Each year youth participants will receive a new penpal, but they can decide to also continue writing with their previous penpals. "We hope this will forge many new friendships!" says Youth Committee chair Lucy Nold. Youth members can sign up at https://icelandics.org/youth. They will then be connected with another youth member to exchange letters with. Sample topics and ideas for the letters can also be found on the website.

SEA-2-SHINING SEA

S2SS is a year-long virtual ride on Icelandic horses. This year's 4,000-mile ride follows the route ridden by Annie Wilkens from Minot, ME to Hollywood, CA in 1954, as chronicled in the book *The Ride of Her Life* by Elizabeth Letts (Ballantine Books, 2021). The 2022 S2SS ride includes 20 checkpoints. As of June, the ride had 90 riders logging hours. Of the 19 teams, 7 had already ridden over 2,000 miles; they were Cedar Tree Icelandics, Frozen Tundra Tölters, Hestafolk 2, Ice Trekkers, Solheimar Dream Team, Toppur, and West Coast Tolting Girls. Both Ice Trekkers and West Coast Tolting Girls had passed the 3,000-mile mark.

RIDERS OF THE MONTH

Each month the USIHC Leisure Committee randomly chooses a rider in the Sea 2 Shining Sea Virtual Ride (S2SS) to be the Rider of the Month. This quarter's riders are Zo Zinke-Haschemeyer, Lynda Zur, and Pierre Lessard.

Lynda Zur of Wellington, Florida is the June S2SS Rider of the Month. Photo by Lars Struck

April Rider of the Month Zo Zinke-Haschemeyer showed Lolita at the CIA Spring Show. Photo by Zondie Zinke.

Zo lives in Eugene, OR and rides at her "happy place," Five-Gait Farm, with trainer Lucy Nold. Her favorite horse is Talía from Five-Gait Farm. "I love riding on the trail," she says, "especially riding horses at my barn that can't canter in the arena. I also love that when we are just walking, we play games and talk. Trail rides are so much fun, especially one part of this mountain we climb. We call it gallop hill. We just gallop right up."

Pierre lives in Carmel Valley, CA and owns two Icelandics: Andvari from Red Feather and Fengari. He describes himself as "an avid trail rider," who came to Icelandics after riding other breeds most of his life. He rides "mainly to be with my horse in a serene, peaceful, and beautiful environment. I also enjoy the challenges of trail riding: crossing creeks and rivers, negotiating hard terrain, exploring new areas, packing in the wilderness, working on horsemanship skills, and more. There is nothing an Icelandic horse cannot do."

Lynda lives in Wellington, FL with four Icelandic horses: Prins, Vornótt, Þokkadís, and Ísadís. Asked why she joined S2SS, she replied, "I love the Icelandic horse community of people and have found them to be kind and encouraging. Being a part of something that is recreational and goal-oriented has made me a much better rider and more committed to riding every day." She also loves showing off her horses to non-Icelandic horse owners. "People are blown away by their looks, their tölting, and their calm, friendly nature. And that an amateur like myself, and at my age, is able to learn to ride a horse without fear."

WINTER WEBINAR

Breeding Committee chair Virginia Lauridsen attended the 2022 FEIF Conference in Oslo, Norway (see FEIF News in this issue) and found it very productive. One idea was to develop a winter webinar program on various topics relevant to Icelandic horses. This could include how to properly ride a breeding show, saddle fitting, the gaits of the Icelandic horse, etc. The USIHC Board liked the idea, and Virginia will be developing a list of topics for discussion.

FROZEN SEMEN

At the May meeting, the USIHC Board reviewed a draft of the proposed rules for use of frozen semen in Icelandic horse breeding. The Board agreed that the proposal needed further development.

BONE SPAVIN X-RAYS

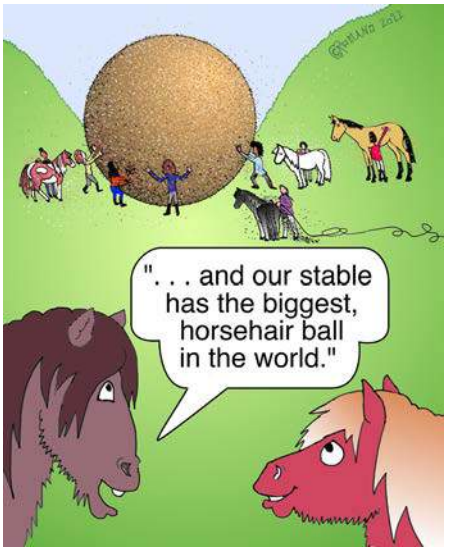
In the past, the USIHC has had a formal agreement with a radiologist at Cornell University for assessing the X-rays for bone spavin on Icelandic stallions submitted for breeding evaluations. However, he has now retired, so Breeding Committee chair Virginia Lauridsen has been searching for a replacement. This year, she has obtained an agreement from Sigríður Björnsdóttir, arguably the world's leading expert on bone spavin (see the article in this issue). While the Board found that any certified radiologist would be able to assess these x-rays, everyone agreed that Sigríður would be the best possible choice. Virginia will reach out to her and agree on a fee structure.

BOARD MEETINGS

The USIHC Board of Directors met by Zoom call on April 12, May 10, and June 21, with no meeting scheduled for July.

May Rider of the Month, Pierre Lessard, hits the trail with Andvari and dog Jessie. Photo by Nina Hahn.

Complete minutes, including the monthly Treasurer's and Secretary's reports, committee reports, and the annual budget, can be found online at https://icelandics.org/minutes. USIHC members are encouraged to listen in on board meetings. The agenda and information on how to connect are posted on the USIHC website



CONFERENCE 2022

Almost 80 participants from 12 member countries met for the 2022 FEIF Conference in Oslo, Norway. As the Delegates Assembly was held online in February, this year's conference included several panel discussions as well as the annual meetings of all FEIF departments.

In the general meetings, several topics were presented: the future of the World Championships and WorldFengur, the working processes within FEIF, current vaccination requirements (influenza and herpes), and next years' activities for the Horses of Iceland marketing initiative.

At the FEIF Chairpersons Meeting, the participants discussed additional topics, including the welfare of the horse at events and how and when officials might need to be suspended.

Based on the presentation in the general assembly on the decision-making process within FEIF, there was agreement that the chairpersons need to arrange further meetings during the year to make sure that there is good communication with all countries. In addition, the Swedish participants prepared a very interesting presentation on social media and how to handle it within each country, particularly in connection with volunteers.

YOUTH

At the FEIF Conference, the 2021 Youth Country of the Year award was presented to Great Britain. After two years of pandemic restrictions, the judges decided to focus less on what had actually been organized, but rather pay more attention to the obstacles faced by small countries with regard to Icelandic horse events. In their report, the Youth Committee of Great Britain provided a realistic and honest analysis of the difficulties they face, in terms of low numbers, a small budget, and huge distances between young riders. At the same time, these handicaps were balanced by innovative ideas and the lessons learned from the isolation caused by living with Covid-19.

In the Youth Committee meeting, the national youth leaders discussed how to improve on past events and prepare future events, especially the next FEIF Youth Camp planned for summer 2023 in Finland. Each discussion led back to the same question: How can we improve the flow of communication between FEIF and the relevant people within the member associations?

New ground was broken in an open discussion about sexual harassment in the equestrian world. FEIF strongly urges all member associations to discuss, review, or adopt a strong Child Protection Policy.

BREEDING

Eighteen participants from 10 FEIF member associations participated in the 2022 FEIF Breeding meeting; many of them were new in their positions. As usual, the agenda was long, with several draft proposals for changes to the rules and regulations. The FEIF Breeding department plans to organize a seminar and exam for new breeding judges, a seminar for national breeding committee members, and a workshop for WorldFengur registrars in autumn 2022. So far, around 45 international breeding shows are scheduled for this year, and the judging panels have been set up for all of them.

The FEIF Breeding Judges Committee produced a video with some clarifications regarding the demands for the highest marks at breeding shows. The video is currently available in English, Swedish, and Icelandic; the German version will follow soon. A big thank you to SIF Avel, Alendis, and Eidfaxi! See https://www.feif.org/2022/05/06/requirements-for-highest-marks/

EDUCATION

Although an online FEIF Education meeting took place in February, a face-to-face workshop was offered during the conference. Education can be seen as the glue between many FEIF departments, and its committee members felt they could cooperate even more with other departments. For example, there already are combined sport judge and trainer seminars. The committee is working on a survey regarding the different national requirements for the trainer levels, with the aim of achieving harmonization and mutual acceptance between member countries. On Sunday, representatives went to other department meetings, mainly to the youth department, as there were related topics on the agenda.

LEISURE

The Leisure Riding Committee's meeting was the first led by Christian Eckert, who was elected as Director of Leisure Riding in 2020. Each country presented a special project to provide ideas for activities to the other countries. Based on these presentations, the group decided to adopt the concept presented by the Norwegian representative for the FEIF Tour Rider Cup. Further countries showed interest in hosting the photo competition, which has had a large number of participants both this year and last.

SAFETY VIDEO

Explore how horses react to various stimuli in a video produced through the cooperation of Horses of Iceland, Landssamband hestamannafélaga, and the Icelandic Transport Authority. See https://www.feif.org/2022/05/21/safety-video/

SPORT

As usual, the national Sport Leader Meeting had a long agenda and there were good discussions on several sport-related topics. Some of these were accepted as proposals for the 2023 Delegates Assembly, e.g. earplugs as allowed equipment, harmonization and rearrangement of the elimination and disqualification rules in Sport, ideas to prevent huge finals, the possibility of starting in more than one tölt test and in more than one four- or five-gait test in one competition, a proposal for more approachable entry-level tests, and a different way of registering teams at the World Championships.

Riding the last section of T2 on both reins was accepted as an optional experiment for this year. Follow the link for further details: https://www.feif.org/2022/05/17/t2-tolt-option-for-trial-in-2022/

Furthermore, the sport leaders talked about herpes vaccinations and the Gæðingafími test, for which the rules at the moment are translated from Icelandic into English and German. The topics of using video evidence, judging pace in five-gait tests, and riding the required sections of T2 and T1 in any order will be further discussed in the Sport Committee and the Sport Judges Committee this fall.

WORLDRANKING

After 25 years, during which only the performance of the riders has been compared, the FEIF WorldRanking system will be switched to a rider-horse-combination ranking. The reason for this change is that riders have sometimes been listed several times in a ranking, when ranked with different horses.

As in the past, the WorldRanking will include the best three results per rider-horse-combination per test for the last two years. The rules remain unchanged; only results of 5.50 or higher (or the equivalence in time) are taken into account. The results have to be achieved at an approved FEIF WorldRanking event. Find the world ranking scoreboard here: https://www.feif.org/sport-dept/worldranking/worldranking/

WC 2025

The 2025 Icelandic Horse World Championships will take place in in Birmenstorf, Switzerland. Ueli Heller, president of the association "Icelandic Horse World Championships in Switzerland"; Roman Spieler, OC President World Championships 2025; Jean-Paul Balz, FEIF Director of Sport; Gunnar Sturluson, FEIF President; and Inge Kringeland, FEIF Breeding Leader put their signatures on the agreement, so the contract is now valid and "the beat goes on!"

YOUNG LEADERS

Eighteen young adults from eight different countries gathered for a full weekend of sharing experiences and team building in the beautiful city of Vienna, hosted by the Austrian Association, ÖIV. The topic of the meeting was "Digital networking in the equine sector," and the first day included a stable tour at Fiaker Paul, where a workshop about what to think about when posting on social media was held. The tour was followed by a carriage ride back to the hotel and a lecture about data privacy with Daniel Brandel. The day ended with a treasure hunt through Vienna and dinner at a traditional Austrian restaurant.

Social time is very important in the FEIF Young Leaders conferences, and that part was filled with playing games, exploring the city together, and lots of laughter. During the weekend, new friendships were formed and friendships from former FEIF-events grew stronger. A warm thank you to the organizers and speakers for a memorable Young Leaders Event! Photos can be seen at our Instagram-page: www.instagram.com/feiforg/

BLOOD MARES LETTER

FEIF has taken an active position on the production of the fertility hormone PMSG using the blood of pregnant mares (i.e., "blood mares"). In some countries, excesses have been reported, like taking too much blood from each mare or having mares aborted to get them pregnant again.

Upon a proposal from FEIF, the European Horse Network (EHN) has decided to follow the scientific judgment in this matter, as published by the Federation of European Equestrian Veterinarians (FEEVA), in calling to stop both the import and European production of PMSG and other related products if blood collection procedures in horses do not live up to animal welfare standards.

You can find the FEEVA/FVE statement on blood collection here: feeva.fve.org/feeva-fve-statement-pmsg-horses. Both FEIF and FEEVA are members of EHN.

Following the reply from the European Commission that they do not envisage to follow through with the call made by the European Parliament to ban both the imported and domestic production of PMSG, 20 animal welfare associations published an open letter that was sent to the European Commission.

The welfare organizations requested the European Commission to at least recognize and communicate that the domestic production of the hormone is in breach of EU legislation and to build on future opportunities to ban the production, import, and use by including animal welfare in the Good Manufacturing Practice, which exporters have to comply with.

FEIF condemns the practices and the mistreatment of mares on blood farms and supports the approach of the animal welfare associations that signed the open letter.

CLUB UPDATES

There are 13 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.

Emelia Stewart shows Vindur from Dalalif at the CIA Spring Show. Photo by Will Covert.

ALASKA

by Ellen Halverson

The Alaska Icelandic Horse Association group had two wonderful weekend events early this summer. Over Memorial Day weekend, our group had a Saturday of lessons with Janet Mulder, a liberty demonstration, and a viewing of young horses. This was followed on Sunday by a groundwork clinic with Katelyn Barnett. The weekend's events were much appreciated by all the participants. The weekend of June 25-26 featured another clinic with Janet Mulder, which helped eight of us riders make considerable progress in expanding our skills with our horses.

Nicole Beck on Blikka from Arctic Arrow at the Janet Mulder clinic in Alaska.

CIA

by Helga Sveinsdottir Thordarson

The California Icelandic Association held a wonderful Spring Open show at Will and Asta Covert's Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA in April, with Judge Þorgeir Guðlaugsson presiding and Alexandra Montan Gray announcing. The show featured stellar youth riding and nice performances all around.

Alex became one of the USIHC's newest Sport B Judges, after attending a judging seminar in June at Tamangur Icelandics in Larkspur, CO. Alex relocated from Sweden last year and has been a certified judge in Europe since 1998. Kimberly Hart (Alex's mother-in-law) is busy adding a dressage ring and obstacle course at Sunland Ranch in Encinitas, CA.

In other news from Sunland Ranch, we all grieve the loss of Hróar frá Ragnheiðarstöðum in April. Co-owned by Kimberly and Ellyn Norris, Hróar was a rare stallion who could be trusted with tiny children. He was everyone's favorite riding/lesson horse at Sunland Ranch for the last 17 years. His ability to make people relax and feel taken care of made him unique and unforgettable. His beauty, calm bravery, smooth gaits, and kind nature left a lasting impression on all who knew and loved him. Ellyn and Hróar had an extremely special relationship, characterized by mutual adoration. Hróar will be forever missed.

The CIA welcomes new members Jan and Mike Milos of Clayton, CA. That makes nine new club members since last fall. We are growing!

Jan and Mike submitted this news:

The stallion Hróar, with one of his young fans. Photo by Ellyn Norris.

Lóa from Clear Spring Hollow and her filly by Hrafn frá Garðabæ. Photo by Jan Milos.

"On March 28, two weeks before our anticipated due date on a very cold and rainy Monday morning, our Lóa Ingrid from Clear Spring Hollow decided it was time to have her foal. My husband, who usually feeds our horses around six every morning, called to wake me and tell me to get down to the barn because Lóa had had her foal and they were both standing out in the pouring rain—and the little one was drenched. Our trainer came over and we got the foal and Lóa safely into a stall, where it was warm and dry. Lóa does not like confinement in a stall, but the foal did not mind at all. Once inside, we were able to get a good look and found that it was a filly. She is silver in coloring, with a white mane and tail—the same color as her mom was when she was born, so we are hoping she will turn out to be a silver dapple. We have named her Silfra Melasól. The sire is Hrafn frá Garðabæ, whose owners are Will and Betsy Covert. I have to say I was hesitant at first about breeding Lóa because, to my knowledge, she had never had a foal before and, at age 18, she was an older horse. However, I did a lot of research, and since we had a great place now to raise a foal we decided this would be a good time. So here we are enjoying the new adventure."

FLUGNIR

by Liz Stimmler

The first Flugnir event of 2022 was the Minnesota Horse Expo on April 14-16. The 40th MN Horse Expo was a spring event again, closer to its former (pre-Covid) schedule. This meant, of course, that in contrast to roasting at the July Expo of 2021, we were freezing. But Flugnir members were up to the challenge: 14 horses, along with riders and volunteer support staff, braved snow, wind, and below-freezing weather to educate and entertain the hardy Expo visitors. Our drill team performances are highly anticipated and were up to their usual high standard, even with last minute changes and substitutions. Our calm Icelandics were a huge hit as vendor demo horses for Masterson Method, Bemer, and EquiSentials grooming products. They quietly walked through the human entrance door into the busy vendor venue full of shoppers and merchandise. They were also crowd pleasers representing their breed brilliantly in nearly every clinician demonstration, as well as in the Battle of the Breeds obstacle course challenge. Our calendars are already marked for next year's Expo on April 28-30, 2023. Fingers crossed for good weather!

It was exciting to be able to hold our Flugnirkeppni Show again after a two-year pandemic hiatus—wonderful to visit at length in person with fellow members and fun to watch some talented young horses on the track. Tolthaven Icelandics again offered their beautiful farm and incredible hospitality to host the show on June 11-12 in Pelican Rapids, MN. Huge thanks to the Oliver family for their

Stelpa from Tolthaven and her filly by Strokkur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum. Photo by Susy Oliver.

The Flugnir Drill Team wows the crowd at the Minnesota Horse Expo in April. Photo by Kara Gail.

hard work to prepare for the invasion; to Jackie Alschuler for organizational, financial, and airport shuttle duties; and to Debbie Cook for her IceTest skills and flexibility. A small but dedicated group of riders competed. Because of the reduced turnout we were able to hold all required classes on Saturday, and on Sunday we repeated the classes as instructional events, with coaching from the judge—an invaluable learning experience. Judge Johannes Hoyos was impressive, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable. His coaching was spot on, and all attendees received quite an education. Attendees also met Tolthaven's newest edition, a sweet two-week old filly by Strokkur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum and out of Stelpa from Tolthaven.

Avalon Icelandics in Ellsworth, WI hosted The CREW Urban Youth Equestrians for an educational visit to learn about the Icelandic horse. The CREW Urban Youth Equestrians support American Descendants of Slaves, Indigenous/Native, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and all youth of color to develop a sense of Community, Relationships, Empowerment, and Well-being through work with horses.

Midwest trails are now alive with the sound of tölting hooves. We expect many more adventures this summer for our members throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin, including clinics, obstacle courses, dressage shows, and hunter paces.

FRIDA

by Carrie Laurencot

On a lovely May morning in the beautiful Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve, Frida Club members participated in a mountain trail obstacle course clinic at Double C Farm in Clarksburg, MD. Under the direction of owner/trainer Cridder Halle and assistant trainer Kari, six riders (Millie Angelino, Pat Branum, Pat Carballo, Carrie Laurencot, Marjorie Lewis, and Barb Robinson) worked in-hand with their horses in the arena to foster a strong relationship between horse and rider prior to being introduced to the obstacle course. The beautiful course, with many blooming rose bushes and other plantings, was not only pleasing to the eye, but led some horses to believe they were going on a picnic.

The extreme mountain trail obstacle course consists of over 30 challenging stations, which included a pond, rolling bridge, teeter-totter, balance beams, bridges of various types, a cake-box pyramid, maze, cross box, the notorious water box, and many other obstacles. The riders were divided into two groups, and each group worked with a trainer to navigate the course in-hand, in order to introduce

Frida Club members Margery Lewis on Ljúfa from Tolthaven (left) and Carrie Laurencot on Gnótt frá Holtsmúla 1 (right) navigate the extreme mountain trail obstacle course at Double C Farm in Maryland. Photos by Joy Smith.

Frida Club member Millie Angelino takes Dögunn over the swaying bridge at the Double C Farm obstacle course. Photo by Joy Smith.

the horse and rider to the obstacles and to work on technique. All the horses took the challenges in stride and impressed the trainers with their high stepping and sure-footedness. Several horses displayed the behavior termed "hunting," in which they investigated (by sniffing) the obstacle. Hunting is a highly regarded activity in the world of mountain trail obstacle course competitions and gains additional points for the equestrian team. The quick wit and curiosity of our Icelandic horses makes them a natural for this sport!

Once mounted, the team tackled the obstacles again with much encouragement from the trainers, the auditors, and each other. In addition to the huge amount of fun and camaraderie, several teams conquered water crossings, bridge crossings, and steep descents which had previously been difficult to manage during their usual trail rides. Over lunch, we learned about obstacle course competitions from the trainers and discussed the adventures of this fabulous day. A big thank-you to the auditors (Joy Smith, Altaira Dearborn, and Suzi McGraw) for their support and fabulous photos, to Bob Shoemaker for delivering the tasty lunch, and to Millie and Carrie for all their efforts in coordinating this clinic.

HESTAFOLK

by Lisa McKeen

Hestafolk Club members in Northwest Washington and British Columbia keep busy in any number of ways. Several of us attended a dressage clinic at Vinur Farms this spring. It was a very productive clinic with Freya Sturm, and we learned lots about ourselves, dressage as a discipline, and our horses. In addition, Trout Lake, WA provides a beautiful setting for spending relaxed time with horse folks!

We are still having Zoom meetings monthly, with Question and Answer Time with Freya. Our horses and our members are benefitting greatly. Freya takes questions and pictures from us and then we discuss them at the meetings.

If you have heard of balanced riding, then you might be interested in Monday Zoom meetings (separate from our club meetings) with Freya, as she guides us through movements that will be beneficial to our bodies, our sense of balance, and areas where we may be holding old patterns that get in the way of being the best partners possible for our horses. Freya is currently in training to become a Feldenkrais practitioner and will add that service to her many others.You can contact Freya at Vinur Farm or email hestafolk.com. Along with members Lauren Murphy and RJ West, Freya is also planning a clinic on movement and balance to be held in the Tacoma, WA area this fall.

Two of our members, Judy Skogen and Judy Pratt, made a trip to Hestaland in Iceland. They were very happy with the accommodations and riding there. The pictures were awesome. The club is considering a club trip in 2024!

Hestafolk Club members get ready for a dressage clinic. A little rain doesn't phase Western Washington riders!

At left, Hestafolk Club member Mary Chamberlin shares her trick for remembering dressage patterns. At right, Jeff Rose peers through his horse's ears at the Klettafjalla FunKeppni in progress.

On a lighter note, Mary Chamberlin and I are progressing nicely in our Hillbilly Dressage! We have memorized a pattern and are onto another.

The Sea-2-Shining Sea Virtual Ride is bubbling along. Our Hestafolk 2 team is at over 3000 miles and in 4th place currently. Much of that is thanks to Susan Johnson, in 2nd place overall, with 1264 individual miles. Hestafolk 1 is at 2111 miles. Those of us who can only do a few miles still add to the total! It's a great way to feel like a team and have an excuse for another ride. Because we are so spread out, we ride as we can, share pictures, and celebrate one another.

KLETTAFJALLA

by Florie Miller

Klettafjalla kicked off spring with its first-ever FunKeppni, an informal get-together on the oval track at Tamangur Icelandics in Larkspur, CO on May 8. The goal of the FunKeppni was to break down some of the barriers that are associated with formal competitions and instead focus on the fun that we get to have with our unique and talented horses. The club hosted tölt, three-gait, and pairs classes, with a total of 14 horse-and-rider combinations. The event was a blast, and we look forward to hosting another FunKeppni later this year.

Kristina Behringer and Gyetorp II in Cheyenne, WY hosted an in-person clinic with Caeli Cavanagh over Memorial Day weekend, with great attendance and great education. The clinic focused on riding tölt, with both theoretical and on-horse instruction. Many horses and riders improved their four-beated tölt in this outstanding clinic.

The following weekend the club was back at Tamangur Icelandics for the USIHC Judging Seminar, taught by Þorgeir Guðlaugsson and Alexandra Montan Gray, with help from Alex Pregitzer. The event saw students traveling in from as far away as Kentucky, and included a schooling show with another solid turn-out. This was a highly successful clinic, resulting in the USIHC adding three new Sport B Judges: Coralie Denmeade and Paetra Hennigar, who passed their examinations at the clinic, plus Alex Montan Gray, who qualified based on her Swedish credentials.

Attendees at the Klettafjalla FunKeppni. "Keppni" means competition, but the emphasis is on the "Fun."

Anne Owen with Gná (left) and Sue Agopian with Freyr introduced a Cub Scout troop to the Icelandic horse in the Community Garden at Readington, New Jersey.

NEIHC

by Jennifer Bergantino

The members of the Northeast Icelandic Horse Club were very active this past spring. The season was a fury of trail rides and logging hours on S2SS, clinics, exploring new riding disciplines, sharing our wonderful horses with new friends and groups, show prep, "The Show," and trips to Iceland! It was an exciting quarter.

At Ebba Meehan's Merrimack Valley Icelandics in Boxford, MA the farm is busy with over 15 lessons and training sessions each week. In April, MVI held a clinic with Carrie Lyons Brandt; eight NEIHC members attended. At the end of April, Ebba and her daughter Brynja showed off the Icelandic breed with a demonstration at the ECTA Tack Sale & Expo at the Topsfield Fairgrounds. The event, in the heart of Massachusetts horse country, was well attended and created significant interest in Icelandics. Ófeigur frá Bergi and Blæja frá Eyri stayed calm and quiet in their pen on display. Boarders at MVI spent May and June practicing for the USIHC Spring Virtual Show and the NEIHC Open. MVI became a member of West Newbury Riding & Driving Club to support the park and used the venue, which has a track for show prep, on a regular weekly basis. MVI's Drill Team, which meets weekly, is preparing for a performance at the Topsfield Fair in October. New to the lesson roster will be dressage lessons and opportunities to compete at nearby Cutter Farm in Dracut, MA, which offers monthly dressage competitions. In August, the group is looking forward to its yearly trek at Guðmar Pétursson's Hestaland in Iceland. Looking forward, MVI has multiple clinics lined up for 2023.

NEIHC Member Anne Owen is spreading her love of Icelandic horses in her local community. She frequently does talks sharing the history and having the audience experience the gentle nature and curious disposition of the Icelandic horse. Recently she gave a talk to a group of Cub Scouts in Readington, NJ. The scouts "were at our Community Garden in Readington New Jersey, weeding and planting, and they enjoyed the talk on Icelandic horses. They were allowed to pet them and give them a treat, as well as sit on them for a photo. The horses were loved by the boys and parents."

Another member, Robin Stevens, also shares her love of Icelandics, using these gentle four-legged companions for therapeutic riding as a PATH (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship) certified instructor.

Suzy Graf is "enjoying [her] little Icelandic immensely!" Suzy entered Lia, her 19-year-old, Icelandic ex-brood mare in their first open show in June. Lia placed second out of ten, in a field of mostly quarter horses, in her "in hand" pattern class, a challenge similar to trail obstacles. Lia and Suzy didn't place in the green horse classes, where there were 16 riders. The pair chose tölt instead of a western jog, and the judge likely misunderstood the gait. Congrats Suzy and Lia! So fun to expose other disciplines to the wonders of the Icelandic horse.

At Cedar Tree Stables in Ipswich, MA, home to members of the Myopia Hunt, eventers, dressage competitors, and avid big horse trail riders, seven active Icelandic horse owners have made an impact and have been invited to partici-

The ever-popular beer tölt at the NEIHC Open (left to right): Andrea Smith, Katherine Forest, Jennifer Bergantino, and Charity Simard.

Scenes from the 10th Annual NEIHC Open, held at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY. As Jennifer Bergantino says, “Enthusiasm was off the charts!” Showing tölt are Jackie Harris and Geysir frá Kvistum (top left), show organizer Leslie Chambers and Krummi from Thor Icelandics (top right), and Carrie Lyons-Brandt and Vaskur frá Kagaðarhóli (middle). At canter are Isabelle Maranda and Fjöður frá Álftanesi (left) and St Skutla Club member Katherine Forrest and Njóla from Cornell (right). Photos by Ona Kwiatkowski.

The Vermont Icelandic Horse Farm won the Team Competition Award at the NEIHC Open. Left to right, Arianna Deforge, Isabelle and Amelie Maranda, and Liesl Kolbe.

pate in traditionally "big horse" activities. Most notable was when the group was invited to join "the hunt" because we can "keep up" (the pace is a typical big horse canter) and "have excellent control of our horses at speed." The Myopia Hunt is the oldest operating drag hunt in America. It is filled with tradition and protocol. Joann Haysenn and Jennifer Bergantino participated in the classroom session, and Claudia Burnham, Charity Simard, Phebe Kiryk, and Anna Wallstrom participated in the mounted portion of a "learning the hunt" clinic and have now begun riding in regular morning "hound exercises." The group also participated in jump lessons with jumping pro Laurie Penfield-Fitcher and had regular dressage lessons with Grand Prix dressage rider and coach Heidi Conlon. Heidi has familiarity with Icelandics and has been a wonderful resource in helping with balance, connection, and collection at all gaits. Recently the group organized two Drill Team Clinics with drill coach Phil Whitmore. In a half day, Phil had the group looking like professionals performing a six-minute drill to music. The group's next ambition is endurance riding, spurred on by curiosity and making a new friend, Katherine Forest of the St. Skutla Club, who excels at the sport on her Icelandic horse, Njóla! Two members of our Cedar Tree group, Charity Simard and Jennifer Bergantino, ended the quarter with an amazing trek in Iceland! Shout out to Óláfur Flósason and his farm, Breiðabólsstaður farm.

NEIHC added several new members! Rosemarie Ruggero of Woodstock, NY reports, "I am so excited not only to be a new Icelandic owner, but also a member of this warm and welcoming group. The latter was an unanticipated benefit of owning the horse of my dreams." Rosemarie purchased her new horse, Stoltur, from importer Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir of Solheimar Farm in Tunbridge, VT. Another new member, Carole Niclasse is "completely smitten" with new horse (and first Icelandic), Otur, an eight-year-old gelding who will enjoy his first summer chilling out in Sharon, VT. For Carole, he "makes my life complete!" New member Sheila Greenleaf says it for all of us: "I'm happy that not only have I gotten an Icelandic horse, but found a community of wonderful people who support my horse and all those of his breed!"

The biggest news of the quarter is The Show! NEIHC hosted its 10th annual sanctioned (now National Ranking) show at Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY in mid-June. A huge thanks to Jóhanna Guðmundsdóttir and Kristján Kristjánsson for welcoming the club to their beautiful farm and amazing facility and for 30 years of supporting and nurturing the Icelandic horse in America. You have both made an impact on so many lives. We also want to thank Leslie Chambers for her tireless work on perfecting every detail! The event, of course, was also supported by many volunteers, including Leah Greenberger, who organized a hugely successful silent auction, an important financial boost for the event.

More than 30 horse-and-rider pairs, along with throngs of spectators, enjoyed a pre-show clinic with trainers Carrie Lyons-Brandt and Terral Hill of Taktur Icelandics in Kentucky, a Schooling-Fun Show and a dressage competition with judges Jana Meyer and Alex Pregitzer, as well as the National Ranking show with judges Þorgeir Guðlaugsson and Alex Pregitzer.

To say it was a successful show is a huge understatement. The last full show—the last real get-together of our club—was back in spring 2019. A lifetime ago by any standard. Enthusiasm was off the charts, and every element of success was present: fun, joy, community, friends (new and old), and the opportunity to show off our amazing horses and our partnership with them. The excitement and pride was palpable. For many it was a week of firsts: first in-person competition, first time for a horse to be away from home overnight, and first ribbon! Kate Kalan and her new horse Fifill was first in all these categories, including the blue ribbon in Pleasure Tölt. Katherine Forest, new to the Icelandic world, bravely entered Beer Tölt, where competitors were very serious. Some of the non-first timers, came prepared, reserving not only a hay stall, but a tack stall too that doubled as a clubhouse, where easy chatting and entertaining between classes was enjoyed. Youth were well represented at this year's show. Youth competitors Arianna Deforge, Isabelle and Amelie Maranda, and Liesl Kolbe raked in the blue ribbons! Saturday evening was the highlight, as we were graciously invited by Jóhanna and Kristján into the barn for dinner. Warmth from the cool spring air and wind made for a perfect evening.

SIRIUS

by Janet Kuykendall

The Sirius Ohio Kentucky Icelandic Horse Club tapped the talents of member Maria Octavo, owner of Thorlak Icelandic Horses, to lead and organize Icelandic horse demonstrations and an Icelandic Drill Team for the 2022 Equine Affaire in Columbus, OH. As this was Maria's first time coordinating an event for Equine Affaire, she wanted to ensure the drill team had the right combination of riders and horses. With Sherry Hoover and Carrie Brandt's guidance, Maria brought together Ron Hoover from Ohio and Eldrottning from Beat N' Branch, a six-year-old model mare bred by the Hoovers; Mary Hedrick from New Hampshire and Smári frá Tjarnarlandi, a striking six-year-old, kind-natured first-prize stallion; Kentigern Octavo from Kentucky and Orða frá Skeiðvöllum, an elegant and graceful eight-year-old mare; and Maria herself with Svarta-Nótt from Dalalif, a stunning 17-year-old five-gaited mare.

According to Maria, finding the horses and riders was the easy part. Developing the drill performance, choreographing the music, writing the scripts, and creating the layout of the demonstration proved to be more challenging. The team's goal was to demonstrate all five gaits and the characteristics and personality of the horse, as well as the history the Icelandic horse has to offer—all while keeping it simple, fast, and fun. The team had two riding demonstrations and one in-hand demonstration. Maria wanted to use a song that was up-beat and embraced Icelandic culture, "Ástin á sér stað." Keeping track of four riders on paper was easier said than done! After many edits, the demo came together with the perfect performance drill.

Nancy Radebaugh and Gunnar performed in the Utica, OH Ice Cream Festival Parade, winning first prize in the Equine Division.

With half the team living several states apart, they had to practice separately. Once all the riders and horses arrived in Columbus, the team had only a little time to practice together. The practices were going very well when, sadly, close to the end of the last practice, Maria suffered an injury—she would be unable to ride with the drill team. With this very unexpected incident, all plans came to a staggering halt! With both a rider and horse down and less than seven hours until show time, Maria and Mary had to assign horses to different riders and change the performance drill completely! Now, the drill team consisted of three: Mary on Svarta-Nótt showing flying pace, Kentigern on Smári, and Ron on Eldrottning. The drill team of three only had one run-through before their demos!

We all couldn't be prouder of them and how they showed their Icelandics. The audience was blown away and left wanting more. The Icelandic booth had many visitors that day!

After two performance drills in front of the crowd, Maria and Mary gave a 15-minute in-hand presentation about the diversity of the Icelandic horse. The audience was intrigued and asked many questions afterwards. The in-hand presentation is one of the requirements for both Maria and Mary to achieve the USIHC's new Fast Track Trainer Certification. In spite of a challenging start, Maria plans to participate in Equine Affaire in Columbus again next year.

The drill team wants to thank the Sirius Club and its members for this opportunity. Special thanks go to Karl Octavo and Sherry Hoover, who were behind the scenes providing the needed support to the team and the horses. Also, special thanks go to Jaime Jackson of Top Shelf Icelandics Clothing Company. In spite of a very short time frame, Jaime designed and made the striking Icelandic Drill Team jackets they all wore. Patrick and Mary Neill invited the club to share the booth and stall with their Norwegian Fjord horses. At the last minute, the club was able to acquire an additional booth space, so Sherry Hoover ran off pictures of Icelandics for kids to color. That was a big

The Sirius Club presented the Icelandic horse at Equine Affaire in Ohio this year, sharing a booth with the Fjord horse. Left to right, Shawn Jackson, Jaime Jackson, Cindy Gray-Stanley, Ron Hoover, and Sherry Hoover.

Melanie Ku and Lipurta took part in the Sirius Club's Liberty Clinic, taught by Carrie Lyons-Brandt and Terral Hill.

hit! Many additional club members also helped at the booth. Everyone agrees that it was a wonderful experience!

Since then, our club members have been celebrating summer. Nine riders and seven Icelandic horses met at Mammoth Cave, KY, for the first trail ride of the season. There were a few muddy spots, thanks to April's rain, but the weather was perfect for camping and riding. The trails were well-maintained and well-marked, although a few areas had bypasses around particularly muddy areas. Since the trails are all loops, the riders chose to go out twice for a certain number of miles, then turned around to go back. Saturday the whole crew completed an entire loop. Everyone enjoyed the riding so much that they agreed to keep Mammoth Cave on the list as a 2023 club ride.

Another club activity was a Liberty Clinic on April 30 and May 1 at Taktur Icelandics in Crestwood, KY. Carrie Lyons-Brandt and Terral Hill, the clinicians, were amazing! Eight Sirius Club members participated with their horses, and three audited. Carrie did four different Liberty presentations, which included both lectures and demonstrations, then she worked with individuals while Terral worked with small groups. As inspiration, Carrie rode one horse bridle-less while another horse was free.

Attendee Lori Cretney commented that she thought it was a very informative clinic and she learned a lot that she can apply to her own horses. Lori also felt it was interesting working on the marker training and seeing the benefits for the horse.

Sherry Hoover was amazed at how lightly she needed to react to get a good response from her mare. "Of course," she says, "There were moments where Hrimma and I were both confused!" That had something to do with the subtle cues used in liberty. Sherry developed an awareness of which hand, right or left, had the lead rope and rewarded the "good" side, the side where the horse is next to you, which is the reward side. The correcting side is the opposite side, where you carry the carriage whip. Sherry commented, "Our horses were quicker than us at catching on to the two distinct sides. Numerous times, Terral had to remind me to reward by rubbing the withers with the hand that holds the lead line." What Sherry loved the most was how calming it felt to do liberty with her horse. She quipped, "Oh, yes, there were moments in the round pen where I had to stay calm while my mare ran around. It is liberty, after all! And the horse has a choice." Sherry patiently waited for her mare to catch her eye, and when she came in to her it was magical, almost as if she was saying, "Yeah, I know what you are asking me to do, and I am choosing to do what you ask."

Debbie Favor and Kolka enjoying the Sirius Club's Liberty Clinic.

Both Carrie and Terral have a passion and a gift for learning and sharing their knowledge. We look forward to many more successful club clinics with them.

Debbie Favor and Jane Coleman were the only two club members attending the club's Whitewater Memorial State Park trail ride in Liberty, IN, from June 3-5. They enjoyed relaxing, nine-plus mile rides each day on good trails with minimal wet spots. The scenic trails have picnic areas and wind around Whitewater Lake. Neither Debbie nor Jane heard a 60-foot tree fall nearby the night a passing storm moved through. In the morning, they looked out to see their horses calmly eating grass as though nothing had happened. Ahhhh, Icelandics!

Last but not least, Nancy Radebaugh says, "For 21 years, I watched the Utica Ice Cream Festival Parade from my front yard. Then, thanks to Covid, it was canceled the past two years. Today all the stars aligned, and I finally got to ride Gunnar in the parade!" Gunnar and Nancy's team won first place in the equine division.

ST SKUTLA

by Molly Weimer

Andrea and Steve Barber's Sand Meadow Farm in Mendon, NY is in the middle of breeding/foaling season, which is always an exciting time of year—but this year even more so. Their new first-prize mare, Valkyrja frá Lambeyrum (8.06), a daughter of honor-prize stallion Álfur frá Selfossi, recently gave birth to a handsome pinto colt they named Valtýr from Sand Meadow. Valtýr's sire is none other than the newly crowned highest evaluated stallion of all time, Viðar frá Skör (9.04). With these star bloodlines behind him, it will be exciting to watch Valtýr develop in the years to come.

Our very active St Skulta Club member Katherine Forrest had a blast at GMHA's Spring Competitive Trail Ride & Drive, Endurance & Pleasure Rides weekend June 11-12. Katherine Forrest & Njóla from Cornell won the 15-mile CDR on Saturday, and were joined by husband Jia Forrest with Magni from Cornell to complete the 10-mile Intro Endurance Ride on Sunday. A few days later, Katherine & Njóla headed to Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY for the NEIHC Open Show, and went from trail to track without skipping a beat!

Valkyrja frá Lambeyrum and her colt Valtýr from Sand Meadow. Photo by Andrea Barber.

St Skutla members Katherine and Jia Forrest, on Njóla from Cornell and Magni from Cornell, riding in the GMHA's 10-mile Intro Endurance ride.

TOPPUR

by Cindy Niebuhr

Toppur Club members in Iowa and the Heartland have been busy helping each other find creative ways to spend time with their horses. We have been working together planning and participating in clinics ranging from competitive trail riding to liberty work to dressage. Several of our members have attended horse shows with each other, while others enjoy relaxing trail rides throughout our various states. Some adventurous members have even gone to Iceland and other areas of Europe and shared their enthusiasm for our horses by riding or visiting farms.

In late spring we held a quarterly meeting which brought us together. We were all excited to share our experiences, meet new arrivals both horse and human, and plan for more activities. We are pleased with our Sea-2-Shining Sea team, who continue to log their hours and virtually go across our country on their horses. Many of our members this year completed their Knapamerki training levels 1 through 4, and several more are just beginning the journey into it. Our Outreach Program is getting organized and off to a good start. We hope to have a report for all of you to read in the next *Quarterly*, with pictures of those individuals who aren't fortunate enough to own an Icelandic enjoying them. These opportunities offer a lot of education and fun for our members.

Toppur's Virginia Lauridsen and Hercules having fun—and winning awards—at the National Dressage Pony Cup in July.

THE NEED FOR PROTEIN

by Gabriele Meyer

Icelandic horses are famous for being "easy keepers." But it's important to feed enough protein, while not letting your horse get too fat. This article explains how—and why.

A layer of fat over the ribs ("blubber," as I lovingly call it), a cresty neck, and a bulging patch of fat behind the shoulders—chances are you have encountered these unsightly and unhealthy fat deposits if you have Icelandic horses. Our horses are called "easy keepers" for a reason: They are thrifty animals with the tendency to become easily overweight.

Being overweight is bad for any horse, our breed is not an exception. Obesity—which is the polite way of saying fat—has real repercussions for the horse. Being fat has been shown to lower performance, to cause locomotion asymmetry, and to delay recovery from exercise (Jansson et al., 2021). A thick layer of fat over the ribs also makes it harder for the horse to regulate his body temperature in warmer climates, and compared to Iceland and Europe, most parts of the US are much warmer.

Long term, excess weight puts extra strain on the horse's tendons and joints, and therefore obesity is a risk factor for developing osteoarthritis and other joint problems.

For years, it was thought that obesity could lead to metabolic problems (an increase in plasma insulin) and thus to laminitis, a debilitating and very painful condition of the hooves. Whether that is strictly true is currently being discussed by researchers (Rendle et al., 2018). But even if we do not exactly know how genetics, obesity, plasma insulin levels, and endocrinopathic laminitis relate to each other, we do know that horses that are genetically predisposed to being insulin resistant (whether obese or not) are also predisposed to laminitis.

Therefore, Icelandic horse owners do well to closely manage their horses' caloric intake by either limiting pasture time or by restricting their hay ration.

The key nutrients in hay (or pasture) are fiber, protein, fat and sugars. We have talked about the dangers of sugar in horses' diets before in the *Quarterly* (Issue Two 2011 and Issue Four 2013).

This article is about proteins. The protein content of hay is variable, yet stays within a certain range depending on the hay type. Proteins are important molecules needed to build and maintain muscles, skin, hair, hooves, enzymes, hormones, blood, the immune system, or just about any part of a body you can think of. Next to water, protein is the most abundant substance in all body tissues, from head to tail!

One of the common signs of a protein deficiency is slow hoof growth and brittle hooves. Because my gelding exhibited just those signs, and because a

biotin/zinc-based hoof supplement didn't seem to help him, I began to wonder if he was receiving enough protein in his forage. He is on grass hay year round, and I do have to restrict the quantity of his daily hay ration to maintain an acceptable body condition. After consulting with a nutritionist, I added amino acids to his diet and now, after about a year, I have seen very good results. The growth rate and horn quality of his hooves are super good, and the bonus is that his black hair is soft and shiny! Ultimately, I cannot be sure if a lack of protein was indeed the problem, but it seemed to be quite an interesting topic to look into more carefully, especially because we, as owners of an easy-keeper breed, think first and foremost of non-structural carbohydrates and rarely of proteins in our horse's diets.

In the following article, I describe proteins and their building blocks, amino acids, and explain why it is important to provide any animal with them. I'll give more detail on the protein and energy requirements of horses with different workloads, and explain how to estimate a daily hay ration, taking into account the horse's protein requirements and his workload, as well as the energy density and protein content of his forage.

WHAT ARE PROTEINS?

In order to fully understand their importance, we will need to take a brief look at their chemistry and biology. Proteins are the predominant building blocks of nature. All plants and animals (including us humans) are made of proteins. About 55% of the dry weight of any given cell type (muscle, organ, skin, brain, blood, etc.) consists of protein. Proteins make up all the structures and enzymes needed for growth, development, metabolism, replication, movement, immune function, and brain function, to name just a few. There are about 30,000 different proteins in a mammal's body. Every single one of these proteins has a unique 3-D shape and a unique function. The proteins that build hair and hooves are called keratins. No hoof, no horse! Therefore it is important that the horse has enough protein in his diet so that he can form keratin.

Proteins are huge molecules that are strung together like pearls on a string using 50 to 500 or more small molecules called amino acids. Mammal cells use 20 specific amino acids that can be combined in millions of possible ways to create a specific protein chain. The sequence of the individual amino acids for a particular protein is determined by the cell's genetic material (DNA) and determines how the chain can fold into its 3-D shape. A protein's 3-D shape is responsible for its biochemical properties and ultimately its function.

AMINO ACIDS

When food is digested, all proteins are broken down into amino acids with the help of enzymes and gut microbes. Once they've been absorbed through the lining of the intestines, the amino acids get into the bloodstream and are transported to cells in all parts of the body.

Of the 20 amino acids, 10 can be made by the horse itself, these are called the "non-essential" amino acids.

The other 10 amino acids cannot be synthesized by the horse and must be obtained by his food on a daily basis. They are thus called "essential" amino acids. They are arginine, histidine, isoleucine, leucine, lysine, methionine, phenylalanine, threonine, tryptophan, and valine.

A subset of the essential amino acids are the "limiting" amino acids. They are called "limiting" because grass and hay contain lesser amounts of these amino acids than are needed by the horse. It is a problem if a feed stuff does not provide enough of these amino acids, because the cell's protein synthesis then cannot work properly. If the cell runs out of only one particular type of amino acid, the protein production comes to a halt and the resulting proteins are incomplete and nonfunctional.

The cellular protein synthesis is similar to an assembly line in a car factory. Imagine the cars on the line are already halfway put together, and the factory suddenly encounters a shortage in one particular part, for example, steering wheels. The assembly line will have to stop and can move on again only after more steering wheels have been delivered.

All proteins have important functions, and some proteins are even more important than others. Not having the building blocks to make these proteins is a crisis situation for the cell. To keep the production of critical proteins going, the body resorts to melting down its own cells, frequently muscle cells. From those cells the essential amino acids are then recycled and subsequently used to synthesize the necessary new proteins (Bröer and Bröer, 2017).

Research on the biochemistry of amino acids, and on how much and which kinds are required by any being, has mainly been done on mice, humans, cows, and pigs. There is very limited research that was directly done on horses (Mok and Urschel, 2020). But researchers agree that the limiting amino acids in horse diets are typically lysine, threonine, and methionine.

Of these three, lysine is the only amino acid for which the minimum requirements have been established specifically for horses (see Table 2).

Threonine has been reported to be the second limiting amino acid in typical equine diets, but its actual requirement has not been determined in horses (Mok, 2015). Because threonine allows for the production of other amino acids that together form collagen, it plays a vital role

Gabriele's Askur enjoying his hay.

in the health of bones and muscles.

Methionine is of importance as a limiting essential amino acid as well. It is a sulfur-containing amino acid. Methionine deficiency will show up as poor hoof quality, poor coat, reduced muscle mass, and reduced performance.

Signs that point to an undersupply of any of the essential amino acids are lack of muscles of the topline and slow hoof growth or brittle hooves, as well as a poor quality hair coat and delayed shedding among others. Assigning symptoms to a deficiency in any one specific amino acid is difficult. The effects of essential amino acid deficiency are generally nonspecific, and many of the signs do not differ from those of caloric restriction.

THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

Compared with humans, horses have a very different digestive system. They are trickle feeders and have a small stomach. From there, the food moves through the small intestine to the hindgut, which consists of the cecum, large colon, small colon, and rectum. The cecum is a huge fermentation chamber and takes up much of the space in the horse's abdomen. It is here that billions of bacteria and other microbes break down the fiber in a horse's forage to make it available for the horse to absorb.

Good quality pasture or hay provides everything a horse needs: fiber for the hindgut, energy (measured in Digestible Energy, or DE), protein (measured as crude protein, or CP), fat, sugars and starches, vitamins and minerals. Therefore, quality hay or pasture is the basis of all horse feeds.

How do you know if your hay is good quality? While a practiced eye can determine some of its properties—it is green in color, clean, not too dry, not moldy, not dusty, etc.—by just looking at it, this doesn't tell us if the hay has all the nutrients the horse needs, in a correct and sufficient amount and in the correct balance. It would be ideal to have the hay professionally tested, if at all possible.

That said, regular hay testing might not be feasible for the majority of horse owners, especially if the horse lives in a barn that buys its hay in small batches from different growers or brokers. In this case, we can make some educated guesses by looking at average test results that are being published by laboratories that perform hay testing.

Moreover, hay testing gives information about the amount of crude protein, but unfortunately not about the actual amounts of individual amino acids. Protein quality is determined by how well a particular protein meets a horse's requirement for amino acids, particularly the essential amino acids. In other words, a high quality protein will contain amino acids that occur in similar proportions to the amino acids profile a horse needs. Low quality proteins will be too low in some of the essential amino acids to meet a horse's needs. Feeding more of a low quality hay doesn't solve this problem.

TABLE 1: CRUDE PROTEIN (CP)
Requirements for horses of 500 kg (1100 lb) and of 360 kg (800 lb).
Adapted from the National Research Council (1989). Included are only mature horses with different workloads. For growing horses and pregnant/lactating mares please see the original publication. For convenience, I have listed the requirements in metric units (kg) used in science, as well as customary US units (lb.).

	500 kg (1100 lb)	360 kg (800 lb)
CP – MAINTENANCE	0.6 kg (1.4 lb)	0.43 kg (1 lb)
CP – LIGHT WORK	0.82 kg (1.8 lb)	0.6 kg (1.3 lb)
CP - MODERATE WORK	0.98 kg (2.2 lb)	0.70 kg (1.54 lb)
CP – INTENSE WORK	1.3 kg (2.9 lb)	0.95 kg (2.1 lb)

TABLE 2: LYSINE
Requirements for horses of 500 kg (1100 lb) and of 360 kg (800 lb).
Adapted from the "Nutrient Requirements of Horses", National Research Council, 1989. Included are only mature horses with different workloads. For growing horses and pregnant/lactating mares please see the original publication.

	500 kg (1100 lb)	360 kg (800 lb)
LYSINE – MAINTENANCE	23 g	16 g
LYSINE – LIGHT WORK	29 g	21 g
LYSINE – MODERATE WORK	34 g	25 g
LYSINE – INTENSE WORK	46 g	33 g

TABLE 3: DIGESTIVE ENERGY (DE)
Requirement for horses adjusted for Icelandics of 360 kg (800 lb).
Adapted from the "Nutrient Requirements of Horses", National Research Council, 1989. Included are only mature horses with different workloads. For growing horses and pregnant/lactating mares, please see the original publication.

	Mcal/lb BODY WEIGHT	Mcal/800 lb
DE – MAINTENANCE:	0.014	10.9
DE – LIGHT WORK	0.02	16
DE – MODERATE WORK	0.025	19.6

HOW MUCH IS NEEDED?

Determining how much protein horses need is complicated, and research is ongoing. Protein in livestock feed is measured in crude protein (CP), which is a calculated number based on the amount of nitrogen in the sample. Because there are other substances in forages that contain nitrogen, this analysis is subject to some error.

While there is ample nutrition research for "normal" horses (and much more still on cows and pigs), specific research regarding the nutritional requirements of Icelandic horses is rare.

The minimum energy and protein requirements for horses are recommended by the National Research Council (NRC, 1989), and these are the numbers feed manufacturers and nutritionists work with. Digestible energy and crude protein requirements of Icelandic horses are comparable to the requirements found for large horses (Ragnarson and Lindberg, 2010).

Therefore, I used the "big horse" numbers and adjusted them to reflect the typical weight of an Icelandic horse. Table 1 shows you that calculation. Assuming the typical body weight for an Icelandic is around 360kg (800lb), an Icelandic requires a minimum of 0.43 kg (1 lb) of protein per day if it is not being exercised. That value increases incrementally with his workload.

HOW MUCH TO FEED

Icelandics are quite thrifty and are genetically predisposed to obesity, with all its implications, so most Icelandics in the US are on some kind of restricted caloric intake. Table 3 shows the minimum energy requirements, as adjusted from the data available for 1100lb horses. It is not a surprise that the energy requirement goes up with increased workload. But as you can see, the increase is rather drastic, which emphasizes that we need to take into account how much exercise our horses actually get to determine its daily ration.

Grass hay can have a crude protein content of anywhere between 8% and 14%. This is quite a wide spread. Because my horse is on a restricted daily ration, I was wondering if there were a scenario in which I could end up feeding less protein than the minimum requirements suggest.

The usual recommendation for horses is to feed between 1.5% and 2% of his body weight (BW) in grass hay. My horse weighs 850 lb., and I feed 13 lb. of grass hay per day (1.5% of BW), no pasture. Our grass hay tested with a 10% crude protein content; therefore the hay provides 1.3 lb. of crude protein per day. The horse is in light to moderate work.

If the horse was not being ridden, I would be providing more protein than needed, according to the recommendations of the NRC (see Table 1).

During times with a light workload, the protein amount in his hay allocation should be just right. But when his workload is higher, his protein requirement should rise to 1.54 lb.; in which case, I would have to look for strategies to increase the protein amount in his daily ration.

So, in theory, a horse that is either not being ridden or is in light work can meet his protein requirement by feeding grass hay at a rate of 1.5% of his body weight.

Horses in moderate and intense work probably need more protein and, for sure, more energy. In this case, you have the choice of increasing the hay ration or adding a pelleted feed that provides energy. You should calculate the required amount of hay or pellets to choose the best option for your horse.

But here is the catch: The crude protein amount alone is not really that significant—the protein quality is at least as important to keep the horse's bodily functions going. High quality proteins contain a higher amount of essential amino acids than low quality protein does. And because hay analyses do not give us any information on the amount of the individual essential amino acids, we really do not know what is in our hay. This is why horse feeding relies so much on trial and error.

PROTEIN SOURCES

In the horse world, legume hays or pellets are excellent sources of high quality protein. Alfalfa (as hay or as pellets) has more protein than grass hay, and also a relatively higher lysine content compared to grass hay. The crude protein concentration in alfalfa hay will usually be in the 14 to 17% range (see Table 4).

Seeds and seed meals (soy, flax, sunflower, and others) are another source of high quality protein for horses. Seed meals are the by-products of oil extraction and are thus less caloric than complete seeds. The amino acid profile of soybean meal is superior to most other seed meals. Soybean meal is the most commonly used seed meal in horse feeds, because it is widely available and inexpensive. Soybean meal is especially high in lysine.

Sunflower seed meal, safflower meal, peanut meal, canola meal, and sesame meal are all comparatively low in lysine.

ADDING PROTEIN

Here are several things that can be done should a horse owner come to the con-

TABLE 4: DIGESTIBLE ENERGY AND CRUDE PROTEIN IN GRASS AND ALFALFA HAY

	GRASS HAY	ALFALFA HAY
DIGESTIBLE ENERGY (DE)	0.8-1.0 Mcal/lb	1.06-1.3 Mcal/lb
CRUDE PROTEIN (CP)	6-14%	18-23%

clusion that their horse's diet might be protein deficient or of inferior quality:

Substitute some of the grass hay with straight alfalfa hay, or feed a mixed hay. Because the crude protein content of alfalfa is roughly twice as much as that of grass hay, the protein content of the horse's diet could be bumped up without adding substantially more simple sugars and starches (if laminitis is a concern).

Add a ration balancer: These are highly concentrated feeds that are fed usually in an amount of 1 lb. per day. They have around 25-30% crude protein and other nutrients that might—or might not —be missing from your horse's diet. Read the bag label carefully, and stay away from those that contain molasses (some do, some don't).

Add a product that is geared to specifically supplementing the amount of the limiting amino acids—lysine, methionine, and threonine. Such products are offered by several companies.

Feed flax seed: Flax seed is a very good food and traditionally used freshly ground up or as a component in pelleted horse feed. Besides having a good amino acid profile, flax contains plenty of omega-3 fatty acids. However, it doesn't have much lysine and therefore it is not ideal for supplementing a diet that otherwise is low in lysine. In order to feed 10 grams of lysine, you would have to feed 2.5 lb. of flax seed per day. Flax seed is very high in calories, and 2.5 lb. of flax seeds would add around 6 Mcal to a horse's ration—that is more than half of the daily calories of an 800 lb. non-working horse!

Add a pelleted feed: These feeds have a protein content of 12-14%, similar to grass hay and less than alfalfa; therefore they are totally inefficient to provide extra protein. These feeds are formulated to be fed at a rate of 1lb. per 100lb. body weight and are meant to provide extra energy, for hard keepers or horses in intense work.

TOO MUCH PROTEIN?

One of the most common misconceptions is that high protein can damage the kidneys. However, as Eleanor Kellon explains in one of her newsletters: "Excess protein is processed in the liver to urea, which is excreted in the urine. However, the kidneys can handle this easily and there is no risk of injury. The only effect is increased drinking and increased urine output."

The exception is during strenuous work in hot weather (such as a show, race, or endurance event), where water and electrolyte retention is important. Under these conditions, a high protein diet should be avoided, because excessive drinking and urinating can lead to elevated water and electrolyte losses from the body.

CONCLUSION

I hope to have laid out here that if we choose to restrict a horse's diet, we have to do so by balancing the caloric intake with that of the necessary nutrients; in particular, with the amount and quality of protein, as it is the most important building block in a horse's body.

Hay analyses are not always available, but data collections do provide some idea about the different hay categories in the US. Manufacturers of pelleted feeds are currently not required to list the individual amino acids on their feed bags, nor do they have to list the amount of digestible energy. Therefore, one must resort to reading the list of ingredients and depending where on the list the word "molasses" shows up, the feed contains more or less sugar.

Obviously, you'll need to do a little research to design the proper feed ration for your horse, because the information we need is somewhat hidden on feed tags, feed manufacturers' websites, and nutrition databases. Some nutrition tools and feed databases you can use are:

Equi-Analytical https://equi-analytical.com/

My Food Data: https://tools.myfoodata.com

MadBarn.com: https://madbarn.com/feeds/

Feeding horses is complex. There are so many different details that need to be considered, and every horse is an individual and reacts differently to its feed. It seems to me that feeding easy keepers like Icelandics is especially challenging, because weight gain is always an issue with these horses. Common pitfalls are to ignore that problem until the horse has become dangerously overweight or, on the other extreme, to restrict the feed to a point where nutritional shortages and imbalances can develop.

There is a theory that horses eventually self-regulate their hay consumption if fed long enough ad libitum (Getty, 2009). In many cases this is true, but ad libitum feeding might not be appropriate for glucose-sensitive horses and ponies (Kellon, 2020). Specifically for Icelandic horses, researchers found that they did not self-regulate if fed hay ad libitum (Kunz et al., 2017).

Feed ration and workload are closely intertwined; they are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. Because horses are severely stressed if their chewing time is reduced to a few hours per day, it is preferable to increase their exercise rather than decreasing their feed intake. If more exercise does not help, and the hay intake still needs to be cut back, the duration of the horse's chewing time should at least be stretched out to as long a time as possible. This can be achieved by feeding several smaller portions throughout the day or by using so-called "slow feeders." There are a variety of different slow-feeders available on the market. (See the article in Issue Two 2015 of the *Quarterly* to read more about slow feeding.)

Hay rations have to be weighed and

not estimated by just looking at it. Volume and weight are two very different units and the volume to weight ratio of hay is deceiving. Some hay bales are packed tightly, others fall loose as soon as you open the strings. Even if your horse is at a boarding facility, you might be able to weigh out the hay ration for a day or two in advance and store it in big bags. This also has the advantage that your horse's daily ration can be easily divided up into several meals that can then be given to the horse over the course of the day by staff members or a fellow boarder. At my barn, we have a buddy system in place which works quite reliably.

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Gabriele's feed room tools are a fish scale, a bucket, and a weight tape.

ABOUT BONE SPAVIN

by Shaila Sigsgaard and Martin K. Nielsen

Most people involved with Icelandic horses have heard about bone spavin and know that it is a chronic condition affecting the hocks and can cause lameness. But did you know that the lesions leading to spavin are congenital? Icelandic scientist Sigríður Björnsdóttir, a world authority on bone spavin, explains that genetics appear to be the most important predisposing factor for the condition.

In the not-too-distant past, bone spavin was regarded a major welfare issue in Icelandic horses. It was generally believed that spavin was associated with the conformation of the hindlegs, too strenuous training in young and immature horses, and suboptimal hoof care, among other things.

Several studies conducted around the year 2000, for example, suggested that spavin was predisposed for by a straight hock conformation and that the condition was affecting up to 30% of all Icelandic horses aged 6-12 years. While conformation and biomechanics can still affect the course of the disease, they are no longer considered among the main factors leading to spavin.

Today, spavin appears to have become much less common in Icelandic horses. According to Sigríður, the explanation is primarily genetic. Today, all Icelandic stallions are examined for signs of spavin when they are evaluated for breeding purposes, and this has decreased the occurrence of the disease markedly. The heritability of bone spavin was previously estimated to be about 33%, but the positive effects of the spavin screening program might suggest that the heritability is even higher, Sigríður says. Although it is not prohibited to use stallions with spavin in breeding, very few breeders choose to do so.

Sigríður Björnsdóttir, Veterinary Officer for the Health and Welfare of the Horse at the Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority, has authored numerous scientific studies on bone spavin. Photo by Arnþór Birkisson.

Sigríður has recently agreed to serve the USIHC as the designated evaluator of all spavin screening X-rays taken from Icelandic stallions entering the US Icelandic horse breeding program. When asked if one should use a horse with bone spavin in breeding, her response is clear. "It is a really bad idea," she states.

SPAVIN IS CONGENITAL

It's now clear that bone spavin is congenital. New information about this old disease has illustrated that the precursor of bone spavin develops in the fetus and very young foal, and that the disease, therefore, is not "man-made," as often assumed.

In recent years, Sigríður and her collaborators have published findings that put bone spavin in a new light. Decreased blood flow to the developing joints in the fetus during late pregnancy can interfere with the development of joint cartilage. A new study has demonstrated that spavin starts as tarsal osteochondrosis, a disease of the joint cartilage in the small bones of the tarsal joints in the hocks. Sigríður and her colleagues examined tarsal joints from aborted fetuses and foals up to five months of age and found tarsal osteochondrosis in both the aborted fetuses and the foals.

In another study, the scientists set out to demonstrate the connection between tarsal osteochondrosis and spavin in Icelandic horses. Using advanced diagnostic imaging, they demonstrated a high occurrence of intertarsal osteoarthritis of the hock in very young Icelandic horses. In the early stages, the lesions were observed in the joint cartilage, and the scientists were able to demonstrate that these lesions can lead to classic spavin later in life. They suggest that the bony deposits often observed around the joints of the hock in classic spavin develop as the bones increase in size in still-growing young horses. Due to these lesions in the joint cartilage and in the underlying bone, the osteochondrosis causes a chronic state of irritation of the joints; this stimulates the degenerative joint disease characteristic of bone spavin. Classic spavin usually occurs in mature horses, but these findings suggest that horses are born with the disorders leading to the disease.

An X-ray of an Icelandic horse with bone spavin. The arrows point to the intertarsal joints of the hock, and the circle highlights an area with bone degeneration (exostoses) characteristic of spavin. Photo courtesy of Sigríður Björnsdóttir.

Sigríður and her colleagues also demonstrated that advanced diagnostic imaging, such as MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) and CT (Computerized Tomography), can detect the very early stages of this condition in young horses, before bone spavin has even developed.

WHAT IS BONE SPAVIN?

A horse's hock contains several joints. The large tarsal joint corresponds to our ankle, and the so-called intertarsal joints are the equivalents of the joints between the many small bones in our instep.

Bone spavin is a condition of chronic degeneration (osteoarthritis) in the intertarsal joints. The disease begins in the joint cartilage, which degrades over time. This causes chronic inflammation in the joint, and new bone formation will lead to degeneration of the joints.

Horses with bone spavin generally show varying degrees of hindleg lameness. Some horses have stiff hindleg movements, which improve after warming up. Other horses can be severely lame and cannot be ridden. Yet other horses have no clinical signs at all. It should be noted that many horses have spavin in both hocks, which makes it challenging to see the lameness without further examination, including systematic nerve and joint blocks.

Many horses will have sore and stiff backs and loins because they tend to move with a stiff back to compensate for the painful condition in the hindlegs. Horses with fully developed bone spavin often develop a characteristic gait pattern. The hindlegs tend to move in a stiffened fashion and the toes are often touching the ground before the remainder of the hooves.

Several criteria should be met before spavin can be diagnosed. Lameness should be located to one or both hindlegs, and local analgesics should be used to demonstrate that the lameness is associated with the hocks.

All lameness evaluations include evaluating the horse at the walk and trot (or whatever gait it offers) in both a straight line and on a circle. Flexion tests are usually performed on the hocks, but a flexion test alone is not diagnostic for spavin.

Ultimately, bone spavin is a radiographic diagnosis, which means that X-rays are used to demonstrate bone malformation around the joints of the hocks.

TREATMENT

It is not possible to treat or cure the bone malformations characteristic of spavin once they have developed. In many cases, a spavin management plan can be developed, including appropriate levels of exercise, corrective trimming and shoeing, and medication. Surgical procedures can be applied in certain cases.

Two strategies exist for medical treatment of bone spavin. Either the goal is to promote complete fusion of the intertarsal joints, or the strategy is to counteract the process and provide pain relief.

Promoting fusion of the joints is a possibility, because there is very little motion in the intertarsal joints. There will be relatively limited biomechanical consequences of a fusion (ankylosis), but this is often very painful and therefore rarely used. Certain medications can be injected to stimulate this process, and there is a surgical procedure called arthrodesis aimed at promoting the fusion process. However, this strategy will only be chosen in cases where the condition is already far progressed.

More often, the alternative chosen is to counteract and relieve the manifestations of spavin. Several medications can be used for this purpose, including corticosteroids, tiludronate, and bisphosphonates; some veterinarians make use of gold implantations for treatment of spavin, as well. The veterinarian will put together a treatment plan based on clinical findings, X-rays, and other relevant information.

In addition to offering good quality hay, vitamins and minerals, good quality hoof trimming and shoeing, and regular exercise, what else can help a horse with spavin?

The amount of exercise has to be adjusted to the individual horse, the degree of spavin, and how the horse is affected by the condition. It is a general rule of thumb that horses with bone spavin will most likely benefit from being ridden and exercised in a restricted manner.

SUPPLEMENTS

Very few supplements have been properly evaluated for their effects on the manifestations of bone spavin. One exception is omega-3 fatty acids, which have been tested in a couple of studies and appear to have an anti-inflammatory effect. This can be beneficial when managing horses with osteoarthrosis, which, as a category of chronic inflammatory conditions, includes spavin.

Two scientific studies have evaluated the effects of supplementing omega-3 fatty acids for 90 days. The horses studied had osteoarthrosis in various joints, including the hocks. Those that received the supplement had lower plasma concentrations of prostaglandins, and their counts of white blood cells in the joint fluid (synovial fluid) were also lowered. One study was led by the world-renowned equine scientist Wayne McIlwraith from Colorado State University. "There is evidence that omega-3 fatty acids, especially eicosapentaenoic acid acid (EPA) and

Richard Davis's gelding Frosti frá Akureyri is one of two horses he owns that have been diagnosed with bone spavin. Each is kept in training by Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir of Solheimar Farm using an individualized lunging regimen; they also receive twice-yearly injections and daily supplements. Here Frosti, then 19, shows tölt at the 2017 NEIHC Show. Photo by Ona Kwiatkowski.

docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), can reduce inflammation," he says, "and in-vitro studies have shown that they inactivate aggrecanase, a critical enzyme involved in the degradation of joint cartilage." Taken together, these findings suggest that joint inflammation was reduced in the horses receiving the omega-3 supplement.

Several other supplements have been evaluated, but the results are less clear, so it remains unknown how well many of these help to address the manifestations of bone spavin.

Some active ingredients with a possible beneficial effect for horses with bone spavin include the following:

MSM (methylsulfonylmethane): A component of joint cartilage and connective tissue, it has been shown to have some anti-inflammatory effect. It also increases blood circulation.

Chondroitin sulphate: It nourishes the joint cartilage and increases its elasticity.

Hyaluronic acid: It is a precursor of glucosamine and glucuronic acid, which are components of joint cartilage and synovial fluid.

Chitin hydrolysate: It promotes healthy joint cartilage and stimulates production of glucosaminoglycans (GAGs), which are important components of healthy joint cartilage.

If your horse is diagnosed with bone spavin, talk with your veterinarian about supplements and discuss which ones may be right for your horse. Your veterinarian may also make additional recommendations for supportive procedures such as acupuncture, chiropractic, osteopathy etc.

PROGNOSIS

The prognosis for any horse with bone spavin depends on several factors, including the number of joints affected, which joints are involved, the severity of the X-ray findings, and the progression of the condition. The veterinarian will assess the degree of bone malformation (exostoses) and consider how much the horse is ridden, as well as what kind of riding it is used for. Finally, the horse's response to the initial treatments will be considered as well.

Many horses with bone spavin can perform at a lower and less strenuous level, although they will rarely be able to perform as high-level show horses. However, there are famous examples of Icelandic horses who had great careers in pace racing despite advanced bone spavin.

Richard and Frosti showing canter at the 2017 NEIHC Show. "Spavin doesn't keep them from being ridden—not at all, if you take care of it and put time and money into their treatment," Richard says. "In fact, they need to be worked." Photo by Jean Ervasti.

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Horse Teachers

by Ellen Lichtenstein

Ellen Lichtenstein (right) at the office, with her husband Michael Podhajsky and her "facilitators" (horses) Snuggur from Windstar, Tilraun frá Pulu, and Keilir from Klakahross. All photos by Sarah Johnson of Twigs & Shoots Photography.

It was a hot day in July and Tilraun frá Pulu, who had arrived from Iceland less than two years prior, swished her tail and stomped her foot in annoyance at the buzzing flies. A businesswoman stood cautiously a few feet away from the horse and seemed on edge each time the bay mare twitched or shifted.

"Is she mad at me?" The businesswoman asked, for the third time in five minutes.

"I notice you've asked that a few times now. Do you find yourself wondering if people are mad at you often?"

"No!" The businesswoman stated quickly and emphatically, before taking a breath and more slowly responding, "Actually, yes. Especially with my kids. If they give me a look or say something the wrong way, I take it personally."

"What else could Tilraun be saying, aside from being mad at you?"

The businesswoman thought for a minute and watched the horse, finally noticing the buzzing flies. "Maybe she's just trying to get the flies to stop landing on her leg."

"And how might that relate to other people in your life?"

Again, after a thoughtful pause, the businesswoman responded. "Sometimes, the way my kids talk to me, or a look they give me, makes me think they're giving me attitude and I respond back at them like they are. And then it escalates because they really didn't have any disrespect toward me, but now I've come back at them aggressively and they're on the defensive. Maybe they were really just swatting at flies, and it had nothing to do with me."

I smiled and watched as my client absorbed this realization. It was all her: The horses and I didn't really do anything. But I'd noticed the right thing and asked the right question to help her learn something about herself that could change the way she relates to her family. This is the magic of equine facilitated learning, and these are the moments I live for as a practitioner.

A DEGREE FROM HORSE U

I've been a horse person all my life. I remember riding at summer camp as early as age six, and I convinced my grandfather to buy me my first horse when I was eleven. I didn't discover the Icelandic horse until much later (nobody's perfect!), but I spent my childhood and teenage years in the company of Quarter Horses, Paints, Arabians, and other common American breeds in my home state of Alabama. I went on to ride with the NYU Equestrian Team in college, and I bought my first horse as an adult in 2009, once I had the stability to do so.

Through my experiences with horses as a child, teen, and young adult, I learned valuable lessons that I didn't realize or quantify until much later.

LESSONS LIKE:

- Micromanagement is not only ineffective, it's also counterproductive.
- Mistakes are almost always due to unclear communication, bad instructions, or mismatched expectations.
- Managing someone more experienced than you, smarter than you, or more skilled than you isn't a threat—it's the biggest learning opportunity you can get.
- You get the best results from others when you make the effort to learn what motivates them.
- Being a leader means putting the good of your team or partners above your own interests.

I could go on, and I suspect many of you reading this may find these conclusions sound familiar. They apply to our interactions with horses as well as other humans, and they're often the subject of management trainings and professional development books. I've been through very little management training and I'm not a fan of business books, but I've been told I'm a great "boss" from my direct reports over my almost-twenty-year career. I don't claim to be an expert, but I attribute the skills I have to years of trial and error with horses.

Horses don't know how to lie, and they don't choose to respond in an unnatural way for the sake of office politics, or to gain a better reputation, promotion, or raise. Horses simply respond the only way they know how: truthfully and in the moment. If we come to the relationship with positive intentions, acknowledge what they are communicating to us, and treat them fairly, they'll let us know we're on the right track.

They also won't hesitate to show us when we're pushing them beyond a physical or psychological boundary or creating an atmosphere they don't wish to be a part of. When given the freedom to make choices—like where to be and who to be with—horses are very good at showing us where we excel and what we could work on in ourselves. I can say with confidence that working with horses since I was a child has been the best "management training" I could have asked for, and my horses show me daily that I have much room to improve.

"Horses are very good at showing us where we excel and what we could work on in ourselves," says Ellen. Here, she and the photographer's daughter Cali interact with Snuggur.

BURNOUT

Because of these experiences and lessons, the overall dysfunction of the professional world hit me hard, and after fifteen years in corporate America, I snapped.

It was Spring of 2020, and the world was on the verge of shutting down. But unlike many recent career shifts, COVID-19 didn't play a role in mine. I was part of "The Great Resignation" before it was a thing.

I'd simply had enough: Enough of toxic work environments with bullying coworkers; enough of being the reliable overachiever who couldn't take a real vacation unless I left the country; enough of bowing to the whims of CEOs who didn't have a clue what I did, or how much work went into it, and casually changed their minds or killed projects after months of rushing to the finish line.

The people I worked for had attended Ivy League business schools. They had titles like Chief-such-and-such officer. They oversaw hundreds, or even thousands, of people and millions of dollars. Yet they lacked basic kindness and empathy, self-awareness, and the ability to relate. They treated subordinate staff like commodities to be used, not like people with their own autonomy. Worst of all, they seemed entirely unaware of or unconcerned with the damage they were doing.

I found myself repeatedly thinking, "You couldn't act like that with a horse." And I realized I was right. Maybe, I thought, I could use my skills along with the help of my brilliant horses (by this point I had three Icelandic horses in addition to my older grade paint gelding) to make a difference for people still stuck working in the type of environment I had the privilege to leave behind.

After 15 years in corporate America, Ellen found herself thinking, "You couldn't act like that with a horse." So she left her toxic work environment to establish a business, Leg Up Learning Solutions, at her barn.

DISCOVERING EFL

It's fair to say that each of us who has had the chance to interact with horses, to whatever large or small degree, has benefited from equine facilitated learning (EFL). It's nearly impossible to walk away from a relationship with a horse without experiencing some sort of impact, even if you don't realize it at the time. The experience becomes even more meaningful and impactful when the participant enters with the intention to learn, and the experience is facilitated by someone who knows what to observe and

which questions to ask.

I didn't know how it worked at the time, but I felt drawn to take what I knew to be true about the human-equine relationship and put it into practice intentionally. As a volunteer with a therapeutic riding program since 2017, I was already aware of a certification called Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning (ESMHL), but it didn't quite hit the mark for what I was looking for.

I started to research and explore a variety of certification programs, but none felt like the right fit. It was through complete happenstance that I stumbled on The HERD Institute®, by way of its founder Veronica Lac, in an unrelated horse Facebook group. Once I read about The HERD Institute® philosophy, I knew I'd found the right place to start my EFL education. I began studying in January 2021 and received my Level 1 certification in May 2021.

My HERD Institute® training drilled one point into me above all others: "It's not about the activity." Unlike typical riding lessons or horsemanship classes, EFL isn't about a student learning a specific task like grooming, haltering, or riding. Instead, an EFL experience is about being present with ourselves, other participants, and our equine teachers. It can be about playing or experimenting with different ways of being. For example, what happens when we approach a horse one way versus another? What do we find ourselves thinking about when a horse has a certain response, and what does that remind us of in our lives? What does it feel like to assert a physical or emotional boundary?

As the instructor, it's about being observant and helping my participants notice what's happening. And it's about asking questions: "What was that like for you?" "What did you notice?" "What does that remind you of?"—just to name a few. When I help people notice how their own thoughts and behaviors impact others (in this case, the horses), I can help them learn more effective ways of being, both with my horses and with the people in their lives. This can translate into transformative experiences for individuals, professional teams, and families.

It's important to note here, because people often say, "That sounds a lot like therapy," that EFL practice isn't therapy. There are licensed professionals who practice equine facilitated therapy, and The HERD Institute® offers certifications in that as well. Unlike therapy, where professionals focus on processing emotions and experiences with clients, EFL sticks to the realm of skills. I do believe EFL can be a great addition to someone's experience in therapy. It can help people identify beliefs and behaviors they want to delve deeper into. It just isn't the venue for processing.

What makes Equine Facilitated Learning a success? "Horses don't know how to lie," Ellen says. They simply respond "truthfully and in the moment."

MY ICELANDIC FACILITATORS

There's no breed requirement for horses that work in EFL, and each practitioner is going to have their own preference for the types of horses they work with. I just happen to think Icelandic horses are the best partners for doing this type of work, and I'm not afraid to admit I'm biased! My three horses, Snuggur from Windstar, Keilir from Klakahross, and Tilraun frá Pulu are uniquely curious, intuitive, and personable in a way I haven't seen in my lifelong experience with other breeds.

As soon as participants arrive and approach the gate, at least one of the horses is usually ready to enthusiastically shove their muzzle into a halter. When I open up the round pen, one or more horses clamor to get in and be part of the experience. My normally extremely food-motivated mare ignores the nearby grass and stands like a statue on a yoga mat for twenty whole minutes with her head lowered, breathing on a participant's neck while we practice mindfulness exercises. An added benefit of working with Icelandic horses is that their small size makes them less intimidating to people without prior horse experience.

Regardless of what I'm doing, I'm often a de facto breed ambassador for the Icelandic horse. Outside of our EFL practice, we cover hundreds of miles of trails each year across Colorado and neighboring states. I'm excited to report that Icelandics are going to get a little more time in the spotlight as I've recently been asked to join The HERD Institute® as an instructor in their EFL certification program.

This process will include completing HERD Level 2 EFL certification and another year of instructor training, along with hosting training and certification events at my farm. Now, not only will Snuggur, Keilir, and Tilraun get to impact my personal clients, they'll get the chance to help other aspiring EFL practitioners learn and gain hands-on experience that will help them go out into the world and do great work. To me, this is a win-win for myself, the Icelandic horse breed in the US, and especially for those who most need the benefits that come from working with horses. By doing the work to "train the trainers," these three horses will have a ripple effect across the world.

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Riding the Keel

by Nancy Marie Brown

Kjölur means "the keel." Centered like the keel of an upturned boat, the route rises from Iceland's green and settled coastlines over high deserts of lava and snow and wind-sifted ash. It's impassable ten months of the year. Glaciers loom on either side, volcanoes snug under the ice. The Keel crosses cold milky rivers roiling with till. It skirts hot bogs, where gushers, geysers, roarers, and screamers reside among sulfurous bubbling pots of mud. The Keel is not a route to ride alone. I traveled with the Icelandic horse-trekking company Íshestar. We took six days to cover 140 miles.

The bus from Reykjavik dropped me near a communal corral where a hundred horses milled around. I milled around too, with the other tourists, getting raingear, saddlebags, a saddle and bridle, and finally a horse. It was late by the time we set off. There was still some rain, a breeze, clouds, but the evening sun was trying to break through. We climbed a long gravel road to reach a rolling meadow of moss patched with soggy banks of snow. The herd of loose horses passed us and dwindled in the distance. We rode long into the night, the long summer night that never seems to darken. It was still bright at ten, though raining lightly, when we reached our lodgings, a sheep herders' hut. Hay had been trucked in; nothing grew here for our horses to eat.

The next day's ride would be a short one, only eighteen miles. We'd tack up at noon and take only one mount to cover the distance. I chose a big blue dun I'd ridden before. His name, Valur, meant "Chosen One."

In the morning, I walked back along the way we'd come. It was mild and drizzling still, with enough gnats to annoy me, but not enough to warrant fiddling with my face net. The landscape seemed barren and flat, but looking closely I could see some relief: ripples and dips and rills deep enough to disappear into. Speckles of wildflowers, white and pink, appeared among thin clumps of grass and the tangled knots of birch and silver-leaved willow trees—if tree can be applied to groundcover: Nothing here grew much above toe-height. The riding track beside the gravel road was worn narrow and deep, the hoof-churned earth red and peaty. Swans called. Meadow pipits chittered. The generator at the hut cut out.

In the sudden stillness, from past the corral came the low thrum of a tractor. I turned to stare. Beyond the struggling machine, in the direction we would be riding, a long bog of mire and black sand barred us from a scattering of lakes—silver lines interrupted by blue blots of islands. A thin strip of blue on the horizon marked the high mountains I knew from the map—I had gone over it at breakfast with Hjalti, the leader of our riding tour. A blink of snow showed a glacier beyond. I was glad I had not brought a camera on the ride. Here in the center of Iceland, a camera was simply useless. No frame could contain such vastness. Even eyes could not fathom the sky's great dome. It

dizzied me to stand in the road and look up and turn a slow circle. I felt I could stand forever under this endless gray sky and at the same time I was terrified. Like looking off a cliff and wishing to fly.

I walked to the corral where Eyjolfur, one of our guides, leaned on the fence. I asked about the tractor. The farmer, he explained, fattened sheep out here in what once had been wasteland. He earned a tax rebate from the soil conservation service if he fertilized. It's very new, Eyjolfur agreed, an experiment, to fertilize the highlands. A feeble effort, I thought. So much land surrounded us, so little of it green.

Four hours later, all human efforts seemed equally feeble. Riding Valur, I had marveled at the free-running herd strung out in front of us, single-file, a hundred horses silhouetted against the sand, gray, black, chestnut, dun, pinto, palomino, roan, bay, their lively legs blurring to wheels as they raced along, a line of moving color against a completely still landscape of barren ground, silver lakes, ageless mountains, the icy dome of Hofsjokull glacier cutting the clouds ahead, the endless gray sky. Nothing changed all day but that pattern painted by the running herd. Nothing moved except ourselves. No sheep, no tractors or jeeps or ATVs went past—all of which had met us on the first day of our ride, as the road and the riding track criss-crossed.

BUT WE WERE NOT ALONE

This night's lodgings were sparer than the last—fewer rooms, each with more beds. I was tardy untacking and had to bunk in the dining hall. Lounging there, jotting notes, I felt eyes on my neck. I turned to see Hofsjokull outside the windows, stretching across three of them and around the corner like an intelligence looming between earth and sky, gleaming yellow-white unlike anything real, brilliant, misshapen, awake, a rising moon in wintertime, its edges blurred and shifting. It seemed to breathe. It drew me outside in spite of sore muscles.

I walked dead away from it, across the tussocky field to the gravel banks of the glacial river. The day was warm, now the clouds had lifted. I took off my boots to wade—the water was not icy in the shallows, over black sand. Wind sang in my ears. A golden plover called bi-bi, bi-bi. The roar of the river was louder than either wind or bird, but somehow so constant as to mimic silence. A shadow rushed across the sun. I shivered and looked up. Unknowingly, I had turned a circle: The glacier was right in my face. Wings of a black cloud rising behind the ice warned me the fine weather wouldn't last—but how long did I have? There was no scale here: I could not guess how far or high that icecap was. A series of jagged peaks beside the glacier puzzled me: They were covered top to toe with snow, while the mountains in line with them were wholly snowless and blue.

Aha. I was seeing only the tips of high snow-capped peaks, their bases hidden beneath the horizon's curve. The glacier was half-hidden as well.

The black cloud flew closer. I picked up three rough rounded black rocks to remember the river by and quickened my pace. The river now ran a greenish-gray, milky with silt, its swirling current deadly fast. The sand petered out. I hauled myself up the high grassy bank, startling geese and goslings, and saw nothing at all around me but river, mountains, ice, and sky—no hut, no horses, no signs of human life. As if I'd stepped through a door into another world, another time.

The great glacier was half-cloaked in cloud. The wind had a bite of ice in it. I backed away. Boots back on, I marched up a slight rise and spied the hut, not far off. My surge of relief surprised me. Before I reached shelter, the glacier was gone, swallowed up entirely. Rain swept in, stinging. The river, too, disappeared.

But the hut was warm and redolent with the smell of frying fish, courtesy of one of the guides, who was a fishing-boat captain in real life. He worked this ride as vacation, I learned when the tourists and guides introduced themselves to each other later that night, after some alcoholic punch and a round of rowdy singing. The Icelanders were struck by the number of times I'd visited their country: That trip, in 2009, was number fourteen. Hjalti quizzed me, in Icelandic, patiently reframing his questions until, with my limited grasp of the language, I finally understood, but still some were hard to answer: Why do you come here so often? I kept Icelandic horses at home, so it wasn't just the riding.

I love the sagas, I said, all the old stories.

Hjalti nodded, satisfied, but I knew it wasn't a complete answer. In 1992 I had attended a lecture at the International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, MI. In Iceland, Gillian Overing noted, the center is the margin. Geography is inside-out. People settle on the temperate edges of the island, while its interior is a glacial desert, cold, inhospitable, and not even crossable most of the year. "What kind of self," she mused, "might these places reflect?" What kind of self has wilderness at its heart?

Excerpted from Looking for the Hidden Folk: How Iceland's Elves Can Save the Earth *by Nancy Marie Brown, to be published in October by Pegasus Books. Learn more at https://nancymariebrown.com.*

Previous page, trekking horses at Landmannalaugar in Iceland's highlands. Above, a brand-new Icelandic foal meets the wild terrain of its homeland. Photos by Nancy Marie Brown.

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The owners of the farms listed below have offered to have you visit in order to become acquainted with the Icelandic horse. Some are breeders, some importers, and some are interested in breed promotion alone. Their listing here does not constitute an endorsement of any kind by the USIHC.

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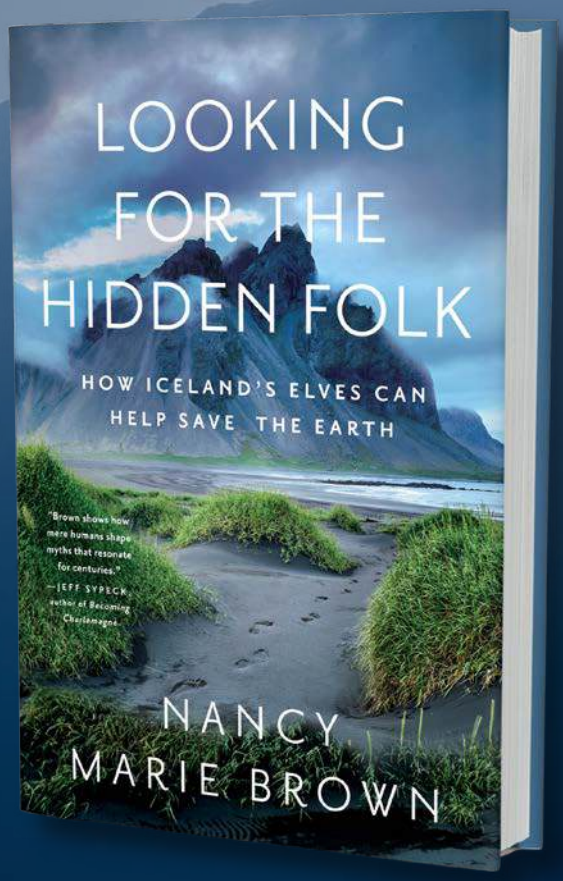

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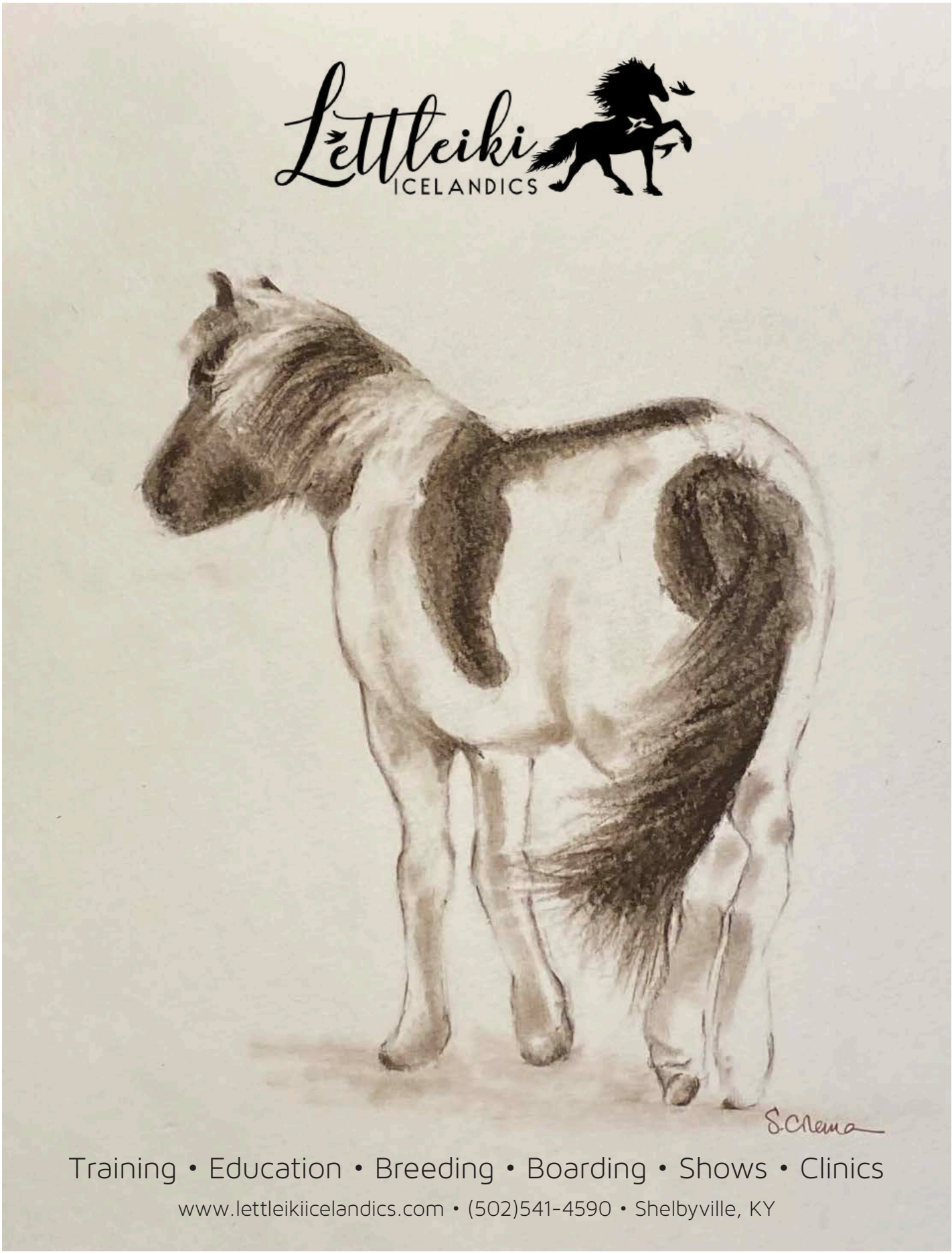

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