Issue Two

2024

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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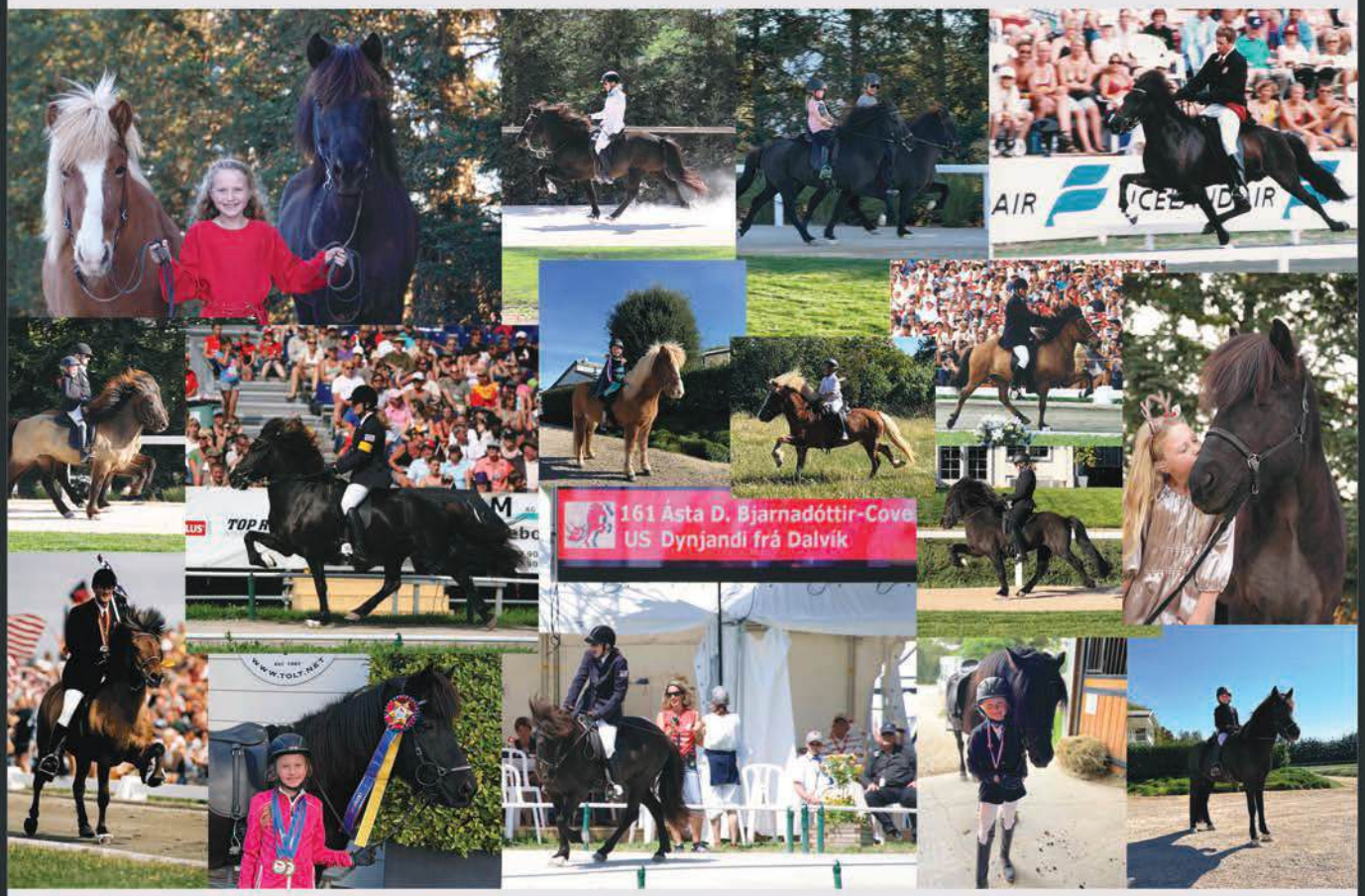

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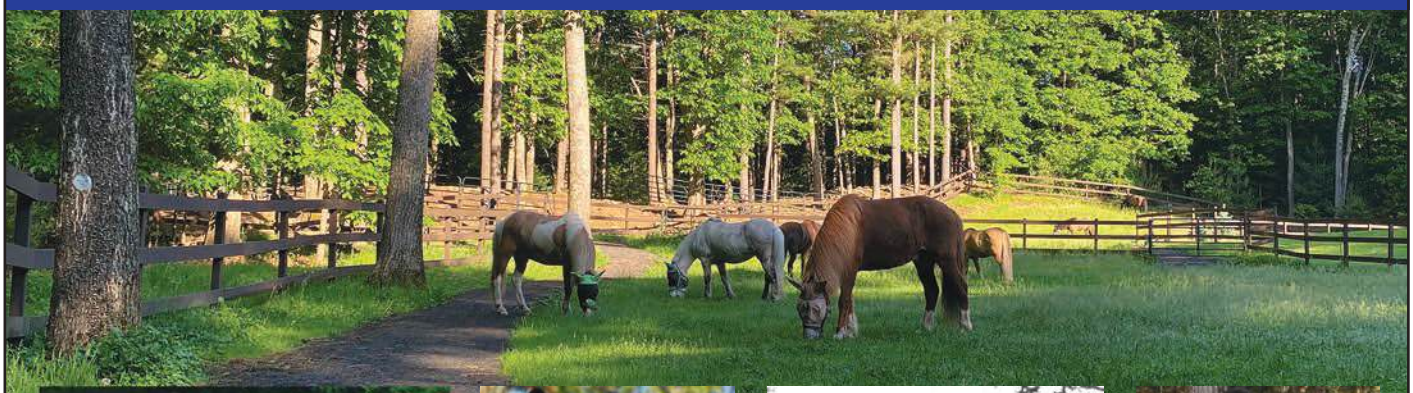

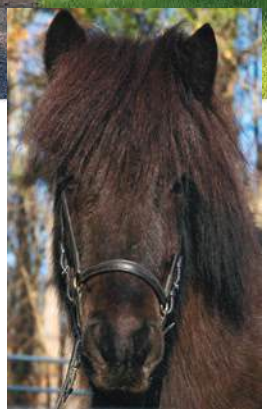

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QUARTERLY
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On the cover: Njörður from Sæstöðum, shown here at three days old in April 2023, is an exciting foal for breeder Heidi Benson. "He checks several of the boxes for my breeding goal," she says, "which is to produce beautiful, charismatic, highly trainable Icelandic horses with clear-beated and easy-to-access gaits." Njörður's sire is Strokkur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum and his dam is the first mare from Heidi's US breeding program, Nikíta from Sæstöðum. The photo was taken by Heidi at Montaire Icelandics in Middleburg, VA.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

The Icelandic Horse Quarterly is published by the United States Icelandic Horse Congress (USIHC), a member association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations), as a benefit of membership. Renew online at www.icelandics.org. © 2024 All rights reserved. **Article Submissions:** USIHC members and non-members are invited to submit feature articles and photos for publication. Send them to co-editors Nancy Marie Brown and Nicki Esdorn at quarterly@icelandics.org. All submissions are reviewed by members of the Quarterly Committee. We reserve the right to edit or reject any submission. **Affiliated Club News:** Contact your club to submit news items and photos for the Club Updates section. **Letters From Our Readers:** All readers are invited to submit letters commenting on articles previously published in the magazine or on topics of general interest. Send them to quarterly@icelandics.org. All letters are reviewed by the committee. We reserve the right to edit or reject them. **Advertising:** See https://icelandics.org/advertising-in-icelandic-quarterly-magazine for ad rates and sizes. For page availability, contact ad rep Jean Ervasti (917-648-8824 or jean.ervasti@gmail.com). We reserve the right to reject any ad. **Deadlines**: January 1 (for Issue One, mailed in March), April 1 (Issue Two), July 1 (Issue Three), and October 1 (Issue Four). **Quarterly Committee**: All USIHC members are invited to join the Quarterly Committee to review submissions, vote on the cover, and help edit, illustrate, and distribute the magazine. Sign up at quarterly@icelandics.org. **Committee Members:** Carol Andrew, Margot Apple, Andrea Brodie, Nancy Marie Brown, Leslie Chambers, Alys Culhane, Jean Ervasti, Nicki Esdorn, Amy Goddard, Em Jacobs, Kate Kalan, Constance Kollmann, Gabriele Meyer, Anne Owen, Alex Pregitzer, Emily Potts, Chris Romano, Sara Stewart, Judy Strehler, Lynn Wiese, and Nancy Wines-Dewan. **Graphic Design:** James Collins.

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THE USIHC MISSION

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

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

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

Photo by Janet Mulder

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 12 regional clubs; activity clubs can also be formed.

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 helps organize 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."

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ANNUAL MEETING

The 2024 USIHC Annual Meeting was held by Zoom on February 24. The guest speaker was Þorgeir Guðlaugsson, who spoke about the history of the Icelandic horse in the US from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s. We hope to report on his work in a future issue. Highlights of the officers' and committee chairs' reports are summarized below. The complete 2023 Annual Report can be found at https://icelandics.org/minutes.

MEMBERSHIP

As of February, we had 852 members in 655 households, continuing our steady increase in membership since 2017, when total membership was only 653.

NEW MAIN ADDRESS

The USIHC has a new main office address: USIHC, c/o Sabrina Bateman, 156 Coon Club Road, Bristol, VT 05443. Realizing that the bookkeeping and administrative duties of the Congress were too great to be expected of a volunteer, the board has contracted with Sabrina to help with these tasks. Sabrina will be assisting the treasurer, Leslie Chambers, in invoicing and receiving payment for USIHC programs and services. Sabrina will also be answering or routing queries to the info@icelandics.org address or (866) 929-0009 [ext 1] phone line.

DEDICATED FUNDS

Over the last year, the USIHC Treasurers have updated our bookkeeping to be in line with current accounting practices. The Congress now keeps a one-year cash reserve fund of $85,000 to cover the website, the *Quarterly,* and other ongoing member services, and to fund the projects specified in our policy and procedures manual: Policy 31 for regional clubs to organize clinics, Policy 30a for in-person National Ranking and World Ranking competitions, Policy 30b for breeding evaluations and educational events, and Policy 21 for promotion at horse expos.

In addition, there are eight dedicated funds to support events and projects of importance to our members: the American Youth Cup Fund ($25,290), FEIF Youth Cup/Camp Fund ($20,523), World Championship Fund ($15,303), Education Fund ($10,234), Breeding Fund ($7,554), Leisure Riders Fund ($5,000), Promotion Fund ($5,000), and Judge Scholarship Fund ($4,000). Some of these dedicated funds began with individual members' donations; others were created from general funds.

Sarah Wood of Vermont is the March Leisure Rider of the Month. Photo by Rebecca Kinkead.

HORSES REGISTERED

Ásta Covert reported that 122 horses were registered with the USIHC in 2023, a decrease of 21 from 2022: 55 were foals under 12 months old, 8 were older domestic-bred horses, 39 were imported from Iceland, and 4 were imported from Canada or other countries. A total of 124 registrations were transferred to new owners, an increase of 21. The total number of US-registered horses in WorldFengur, as of December 31, was 6,986; of these, the majority (3,643) were domestic-bred.

BREEDING

There were three breeding events in 2023: an official FEIF Breeding Assessment in Virginia, a clinic on "How to Ride a Breeding Assessment" in Iowa, and a Young Horse Assessment in Colorado.

At the official FEIF assessment, held at Montaire Icelandics, Eldrottning from Beat N' Branch, owned by Ron and Sherry Hoover, was presented by Carrie Lyons

Brandt for a score of 7.56. Carrie noted that "after her presentation, Eldrottning was trail ridden and shown in a fun show by her owner, Sherry Hoover, the same weekend. Quality horses that can handle the assessment process are also the best possible riding horses." Eldrottning is the winner of the 2023 Cantella Award for the highest evaluated American-bred mare.

Mackenzie Durbin presented Freyja frá Skör for a score of 7.95—almost first prize! "This was the first time Mackenzie had ever presented a horse for assessment," said breeding leader Virginia Lauridsen, "and she said it was a wonderful experience. She not only learned a lot but had a great time."

Judges Elizabeth Jansen and Óðinn Örn Johannsson were extremely helpful and encouraging, and also gave educational lectures on conformation and movement. FEIF Level IV trainer Nicole Kempf coached the riders. Carrie noted that "although the event was small, it was an example of generous hosts sponsoring the event, judges committed to educating breeders and the community in general, breeders and owners committed to quality and further development of the breed in the US, and trainers willing to team up and show the horses to their best advantage."

"How to Ride a Breeding Assessment" was a three-day clinic held at Harmony Icelandics. World champion rider and breeder Ólil Amble worked with eight horse-and-rider pairs for the first two days. On the third day, breeding judge Dísa Reynisdóttir gave a lesson on aspects of the conformational assessments and how the judges evaluate each category. All of the participants took part in assessing conformation and compared opinions. Then the riders presented their horses on the track. Ólil coached the riders, teaching them the essentials a rider must display to receive various scores. Dísa gave feedback on what scores the horses might receive, and how the riders could improve them.

Dísa then traveled to Colorado for the Young Horse Evaluations, where organizers Kat Payne and Andrea Brodie had booked the entire Trinidad fairgrounds—the rodeo arena, a smaller sand arena, all of the pens, and the camping facilities—for four days. Disa gave theoretical lessons in biomechanics and the science of breeding, and assessed eleven young horses; attendees came from as far away as New Mexico. Andrea commented that Disa's detailed explanations gave her new information, which will influence her breeding in the future. (See the article in this issue.)

VIRTUAL EDUCATION

The 2023 Virtual Education series, organized by Virginia Lauridsen, was very successful. The series provided high quality education on topics such as shoeing, conformation and movement, saddle fitting, and the gaits of the Icelandic horse. Due to the popularity of the program it was extended into 2024, with additional seminars on saddle fitting, shoeing, endurance riding, and legal matters. A separate "Introduction to Icelandic Horse Sport" webinar was taught by trainers Jana Meyer and Alex Pregitzer in April; this webinar is a prerequisite for future USIHC judging seminars. (See the article in Issue One 2024 of the Quarterly.)

TRAINER CERTIFICATION

The Fast Track certification program ends in 2024, and the Education subcommittee has been hard at work on the new module system for Trainer Certification. "We hope that this not only allows us to provide high quality education for future certified trainers, but also increases the number of educational opportunities for our entire membership," said education chair Caeli Cavanagh.

Outlines are being developed as templates for certified instructors to develop their own educational materials. Once an instructor's materials are approved by the subcommittee, USIHC members can take these courses and practical clinics in order to attain the education needed to pass the Level 1 Trainer certification exam.

The lecture modules will cover the fundamentals of equine business, equine management and welfare, pedagogy and riding instruction, and riding and training theory. The practical clinics will cover lungeing, ponying, practical teaching, groundwork, dressage exercises, obstacles, and the quality and separation of the gaits of Icelandic horses.

BOOK CLUB

The USIHC Education Book Club, led by Kristina Behringer, began in May with *The Talent Code* by Daniel Coyle. "While not expressly about horses, this book discusses the secret of fostering talent in ourselves and others," Kristina notes. Each quarter the Education Committee will chose a book to read and hold a Zoom meeting to discuss it. This meeting may also have a guest speaker to provide additional insights on the book's topic. Contact education@icelandics.org to join.

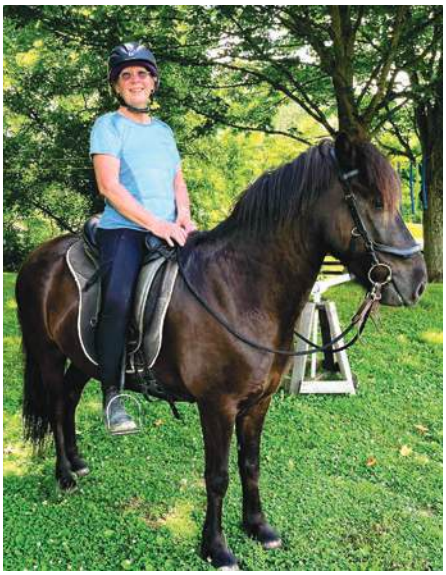
SEA 2 SHINING SEA

A hundred riders took part in the 2023 S2SS Virtual Ride following Route 66, including 17 teams and 13 individuals. The Ice Trekkers team was the first of 11 teams to complete the 2,400-mile ride. The furthest individual rider not in a team was Pierre Lessard, with over 900 miles. The 2024 S2SS ride will follow the Appalachian Trail and the Oregon Trail for 4,000 miles. See https://icelandics.org/sea-2-shining-sea-ride to sign up.

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

The Education Committee has launched a new USIHC Book Club. Email education@icelandics.org to sign up or learn more.



Shellie Greyhavens of Ohio is the Leisure Rider of the Month for January. Photo by Lori Wood.

Rider of the Month. This quarter's riders are Shellie Greyhavens, Heleen Heyning, and Sarah Wood.

Shellie lives in Athens, OH, with two Icelandics, 25-year-old Bjarmi from Cytraas and 7-year-old Fury (aka Frey) from Northstar. "Trail riding for me is magical," she says. "Being with my horses away from the busyness of daily life and just taking in the moment is therapy for me." Shellie has raised Icelandic sheep and chickens and owned Icelandic sheepdogs. "I've been riding horses on and off since I was five, and now Icelandic horses are my life. I've been to Iceland twice, riding for a total of almost 200 miles. I'm hoping for another riding adventure there maybe next year."

Heleen Heyning has known Icelandic horses since her childhood, growing up in the Netherlands. She now lives in Delhi, NY, with six Icelandics: Breki, Duna, Kraftur, Röst, Seima, and Stjarna. Among her goals are to "keep stretching, so as to continue riding into old age." She enjoys "being in nature, coupled with the adventures" of trail riding, but also enjoys "lots of arena work. Those leg yields surely come in handy on the trail!" She and her horses also do liberty work, dressage, and "just play."

Sarah Wood lives in Cornwall, VT with her horse Aska. Of the Sea 2 Shining Sea virtual ride, she says, "I love to trail ride and track my distance. It's interesting to observe the distances others are logging in as well." This summer she plans to ride a 15 to 25 mile race in Woodstock, VT, and maybe a 50-miler in the future. She hopes to master an obstacle course and possibly enter a local parade (for desensitizing, she rides with her tambourine). Also on her list are driving and skijoring! "Having adventures with my horse is the most amazing feeling: just poking around the neighborhood, saying hi to passersby, as well as taking her to new places to discover. Aska is the bravest, most confidence-building horse I have ever ridden—and I have ridden most of my 61 years on almost anything with four legs."

REGIONAL CLUBS

At the end of 2023, we had 12 Regional Clubs and no affiliated activity clubs. The clubs (with their regions, if not obvious, and their membership count) are: Alaska Icelandic Horse Association (50), California Icelandic Horse Association (20), Cascade Icelandic Horse Club (Pacific Northwest, 27), Flugnir Icelandic Horse Club (Wisconsin and Michigan, 27), Frida Icelandic Riding Club (Mid-Atlantic, 76), Hestafolk (Northwest Washington, 42), Klettafjalla Icelandic Horse Club (Rocky Mountains, 47), Northeast Icelandic Horse Club (New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, 188), Northwest Icelandic Horse Club (Central Washington, 28), Saint Skutla Icelandic Horse Club (Central and Western New York, 36), Sirius Ohio Kentucky Icelandic Horse Club (37), and Toppur (Iowa and neighboring states, 40). While two clubs (California and Sirius) require their members to join the USIHC, overall only 62.5% of Regional Club members also belong to the Congress.

Five of the clubs held clinics or schooling shows in 2023 that were supported by Policy 31 funding. The USIHC paid out only $1500 of the $6500 budgeted annually for this program, which allows each club to receive one grant of up to $500 (based on the number of participants and whether or not the clinician/judge was US licensed).

Nine clubs have either received or have in progress a banner promoting both the club and the USIHC. Banners are budgeted at $200 each, though 2024 may be the last year for this program.

Two clubs also received Policy 21 funding to take part in demonstrations: Flugnir for the Minnesota Horse Expo in St. Paul, MN, and the NEIHC for Equine Affaire in Springfield, MA.

HORSE ILLUSTRATED

The USIHC advertised in the 2023 Best of Breeds Horse Illustrated issue with a full-page ad placed directly next to the article on the Icelandic horse. This magazine reaches more than 58,000 print readers and 750,000 digital readers. Of these, 89% own a horse, 54% keep their horses at home, 67% compete, and 82% trail ride.

NATIONAL RANKING

Nineteen National Ranking events (of which six were also World Ranking Shows and two were Virtual Shows) were held in 2023. At year's end, the highest ranking rider in each test was: Tölt T1-Ásta Covert (7.20), T2-Laura Benson (7.32), T3-Carrie Lyons Brandt (7.07), T4-Laura Benson (7.27), T5-Darlene Johnson Skow (6.55), T6-Emelia Stewart (5.84), T7-Eveline Clark (5.80), T8-Emelia Stewart (5.84). Four Gait V1-Ásta Covert (7.00), V2-Lucy Nold (6.99), V3-Darlene Johnson Skow (6.30), V5-Greta Alsauskas (5.70), V6-Emelia Stewart (6.33). Five Gait F1-Caeli Cavanagh (6.53), F2-Laura Benson (6.22), F3-Samantha Harrigan (5.53). Pace P2-Heidi Benson (9.11 seconds).

WORLD RANKING

Three US riders were nominated for the international FEIF Good and Harmonious Rider list. Ásta Covert received two nominations and Caeli Cavanagh and Alexandra Dannenmann each received one.

Many US riders made it onto the FEIF World Ranking lists in their tests, including Heidi Benson, Laura Benson, Carrie Lyons Brandt, Caeli Cavanagh, Ásta Covert, Alexandra Dannenmann, Coralie Denmeade, Mackenzie Durbin,

Paetra Hennigar, Terral Hill, Lucy Nold, Jeff Rose, Darlene Johnson Skow, Emelia Stewart, and Molly Stotts.

"The highlights," noted Sport Committee chair Ásta Covert, "are Laura Benson and Lucy Nold leading the T4 and V2 World Ranking lists. FEIF keeps World Ranking lists both annually, where you need two scores over 5.5 in the same year to get on the list, and also a two-year list, where you need three scores over 5.5 in a two-year period."

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

In 2023 the USIHC began to award Lifetime Achievement Awards to recognize and reward overall progress and consistent dedication over the course of a horse or rider's competitive journey. A total of 54 medals were awarded this year, in levels from Pewter to Platinum. The youngest medal earner in three discipline tracks was Emelia Stewart for Four Gait, Loose Rein, and Tölt. The youngest medal earner in Five Gait was Samantha Harrigan. Four individuals received medals in all four discipline tracks: Charlotte Reilly, Terral Hill, Caeli Cavanagh, and Carrie Lyons Brandt. Two American-bred horses earned medals: Sprettur from Destiny Farms and Ali from Dalalif. Only one horse was awarded medals in all four discipline tracks: Sprettur from Destiny Farms.

GREEN HORSE AWARDS

The best US-bred horses in Green Horse competitions in 2023 were Álfasyrpa from Aslan's Country (6.00 in Tölt) and Viðar from Five-Gait Farm (6.03 in Four Gait).

FEIF YOUTH CAMP

Four USIHC youth members attended the 2023 FEIF Youth Camp in Finland. The goal of the camp is to bring together young people from different countries to improve their horsemanship and better understand cultural differences in our approach to the Icelandic horse. Mia Mulder, one of the US campers, said, "It was an amazing experience. Thank you for sponsoring our country's participants!" The camp takes place every other summer in a different country.

FEIF YOUTH CUP

The 2024 FEIF Youth Cup will be held July 13-21 in Switzerland. The USIHC hosted tryouts for this event in conjunction with the Fall Virtual Show, and five riders qualified. The US is given three participant spots by FEIF, with additional spots announced in mid-April. The US team consists of Country Leader Greenly O'Connor; Team Leader Maria Octavo; riders Greta Alsauskas, Liesl Kolbe, and Brynja Meehan; and reserve riders Miette Jennings and Wells Wappet. Our team must borrow horses, which adds the challenge of getting to know a new horse during the training week before competing on the weekend. Upon arrival to the event, they will be put into international teams, who they will spend the week with, and at the competition they will compete both for their country and for their international team.

NA YOUTH CUP

The 2023 North American Youth Cup was a huge success, with 19 young riders (18 from the US and one from Canada) attending. The event was held at Montaire Icelandics in Middleburg, VA. (See our report in Issue Four 2023 of the *Quarterly*.) The 2025 North American Youth Cup will take place July 22-29 at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, IA.

PEN PALS

Youth members can sign up for a pen pal by filling out a form on the USIHC website and writing their first letter to their pen pal. They will then be connected with another youth member to exchange letters over the year. A list of topics and ideas for these letters will be provided. Each year youth participants will receive a new pen pal, but can decide to also continue writing with their previous pen pals. We hope this will forge new friendships for youth who love Icelandic horses.

SPAERI YOUTH AWARD

Spaeri is the Icelandic name of the endurance horse known as Remington, famous for his determination, passion, and indomitable will. This award, along with $50, is given to a youth member who demonstrates commitment to and love for Icelandic horses by submitting an article for publication in the *Quarterly*. There were no entries in 2023. For complete rules, see https://icelandics.org/youth.

BOARD MEETINGS

The USIHC Board of Directors met by Zoom call on December 12, January 9, and February 13. 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 the weekend before.

In addition to the topics reported on above, the Board discussed the Trainer Certification process and decided the first test would be free, with subsequent tests costing $125 each. Tests will be held in June 2024 during the breeding show at Harmony Icelandics in Iowa. The Board also heard a report on the annual FEIF Conference (see the FEIF News in this issue) and discussed the idea of a breed ambassador award for horses, judges for the Spring Virtual Show, changes to the website, clothing for the FEIF Youth Cup, and registrations for the S2SS Ride. The February meeting was dedicated to the annual budget.

The February Leisure Rider of the Month is Heleen Heyning of New York.

2024 FEIF CONFERENCE

USIHC president Virginia Lauridsen attended the 2024 FEIF Conference, held February 2-4 in Luxembourg, and filed the following reports.

The conference was attended by 124 participants from 17 of the 21 member countries. It was the largest conference in the history of FEIF.

DELEGATES MEETING

The Delegates Meeting occurred on Friday afternoon. Elections were held and the following individuals will serve for 2024: President—Jean-Paul Balz; Breeding—Inge Kringeland (reelected); Sport—Will Covert; Education—Mark Timmerman (newly elected); Youth—Gundula Sharman; Leisure Riding—Atli Már Ingólfsson; Board Member—Even Hedland; Arbitration Council—Tone Kolnes; Disciplinary Board—Gunnar Sturluson; State Authorized Accountant—Lárus Finnbogasson, Endurskoðun BT ehf.

These major actions were taken: The approval of Romania as a FEIF member country. A vote to allow future Delegate Meetings to be conducted online. A decision to adapt the FEIF Rules and Regulations to ensure standard gendering is followed. A vote to increase the cost of WorldFengur by 2€ per member per year. Approval of the 2024 budget.

Among the important breeding-related actions of the Delegates Meeting were these changes to the regulations: Three-year-old horses may be assessed at a breeding show, but only for conformation. All horses born in 2024 or after must show DNA analysis as proof of parentage. Breeding track fences must be 18 inches or lower, and nothing can be closer than 2 meters. A limit was proposed on the number of horses for full assessment per day. Warnings and public reprimands are to be registered in the head judge's report and published on the FEIF website. A change in the wording of the regulations was made to show that it should be the ringmaster, and not the judges, who decides if equipment complies with the regulations.

Important sport-related actions were to make clear in the regulations that: The use of communication devices of any kind is not allowed in the collecting ring or competition tracks. The area where the use of whips is forbidden in P1 and P3 was well-defined. When no sole (or only a net) is used, it is allowed to fill the hoof, including the thickness of the shoe. The maximum decibel (dB) level must not exceed 85dB, measured 5 meters from the loudspeaker. The obligatory shoe check rule was eliminated and made optional at the World Championships.

The Sport Committee was asked to describe how to deal with equal marks of first place for the pace events PP1, PP2, and PP3; to describe how to limit the number of participants in finals; to adapt T2 and describe the required sections of the test; and to adapt T5 and describe the third section of the test.

KEYNOTES

The keynote speech was "The effect of competition shoeing on movement biomechanics and hoof health of Icelandic horses," presented by Mike Weishaupt (see the article in this issue). Research suggests that a toe length of 90 mm or longer is associated with lameness and hoof pathologies. The weight of shoes and boots increases stride length, but does not change the beat. It does create much greater percussion on the joints and bones, particularly on the coffin bone. This occurs because the lift is higher and the arc of motion is changed.

Next, Johannes Amplatz (a Master's student at Hólar University College in Iceland) presented preliminary research on the effect of the rider's weight on the resilience of the horse, in which scientists at the World Championships studied horses with riders up to 35% of their body weight. The data has not yet been fully analyzed.

COMMITTEES

Following the presentations on Saturday, there were the annual meetings of the various FEIF committees. On Sunday, annual meetings continued and then everyone gathered for a summary from each chair. Action items approved in the committee meetings will be voted on at

the 2025 Delegates Assembly.

The Sport Committee had great discussions considering the placement of the saddle, visible lameness, giving warnings and publishing them, horse welfare issues, judge assignments in different countries, and the education of judges. Proposals included: Artificial support for the hoof to be accepted by the chief judge; maximum tests per day reduced by one time per day; punctuality stricter; an opportunity for horses to be re-shod at sport events.

The Education Committee noted that the themes and focus of different countries is different, so it would be great to share developments; for example, Denmark is very involved in horse welfare. The matrix should be updated with these themes. Different magazines produce quality articles: Could we have a central databank for use by all? There was also the suggestion that we need to have a science committee, to embed the idea that we structure our ideas based on science. The Trainer of the Year award was awarded to Lena Maxheimer of Germany.

Leisure riders make up 80% of FEIF membership. The Leisure Committee agreed it should do new things in cooperation with the other committees. Key ideas to develop include: Start an event calendar, with five events from each country; one event should be held in English, so that we can all join. Create a leisure riding academy to provide education for leisure riders through short presentations or webinars. Work with the breeding committee on how to create a good riding horse, as well as how to train and shoe them. Develop the Day of the Icelandic Horse further. Create a FEIF leisure country of the year focused on outdoor activities.

The Breeding Committee elected a youth member to the committee, among other appointments. They proposed rules for honor horses in other countries, new rules for ringmasters, funds for WorldFengur, discussed the conformation assessments at the World Championships, the distribution of judges, and young horse assessments.

The Youth Committee urged member countries to become better at sharing events. Members talked about sexual harassment and the importance of keeping it on the agenda, education for trainers, how to restructure and reinvent the FEIF youth camp, and the importance of having a vision of "the best" in terms of horse welfare. Congratulations were extended to Luxembourg for winning the Youth Country Award.

FUTURE PLANS

The next four years of FEIF Conferences will be held in the following locations: 2025—Faroe Islands; 2026—Hungary; 2027—Austria; 2028—Netherlands.

HORSE WELFARE

During the conference, the participants were split into 13 groups to discuss animal welfare issues. Each group made a list of five important considerations concerning animal welfare. These results will be compiled and then reported to the members.

To summarize the work of the 2024 FEIF Conference in Luxembourg, FEIF released the following statement on horse welfare:

1. Commitment to High Standards: FEIF aspires to uphold the highest values and standards governing all aspects of horse welfare. The FEIF Rules and Regulations are designed to support and promote these goals, ensuring the well-being of Icelandic horses in all activities.

2. Breeding for Health and Longevity: FEIF aims to breed strong and healthy horses, with a strong emphasis on welfare considerations. From birth to the end of life, the welfare of the horse remains a top priority, guiding breeding practices to ensure the long-term welfare of Icelandic horses.

3. Education and Training Excellence: FEIF supports the highest possible standards in trainers' and judges' education. Change is introduced based on evidence backed by research, ensuring that education and training practices align with the latest advancements in horse welfare science.

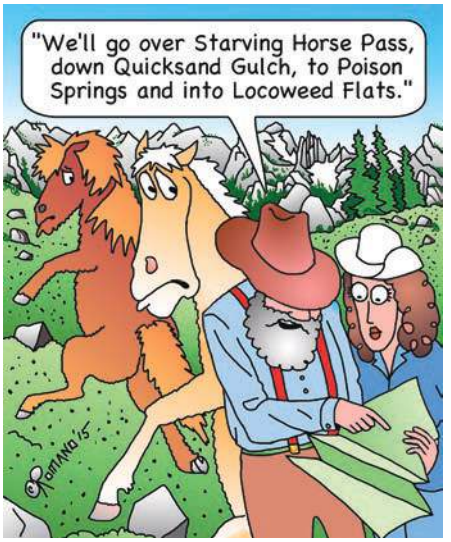
4. Holistic Approach to Training: Horse training is approached with age-appropriate goals and longevity in mind. Recognizing that rider fitness is as important as horse fitness, FEIF emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach to training that considers the well-being of both horse and rider.

5. Respect and Understanding: Riders are encouraged to respect the horse in accordance with its social and physical needs. FEIF promotes the development of a deep understanding of the horse's inner and external state, fostering a relationship built on trust and mutual respect.

6. Biomechanics and Equipment: FEIF advocates for all riders to aim for a thorough understanding of the biomechanics of the horse and the function and effect of the equipment used. This knowledge enables riders to make informed decisions that prioritize the welfare and comfort of the horse.

7. Excellence in Horse Care: Horse keepers are urged to strive for the best standard in all aspects of horse care, encompassing nutrition, environment, health, behaviour, and mental condition. By addressing these domains comprehensively, FEIF ensures the overall well-being of Icelandic horses.

8. Culture of Openness and Advocacy: The Icelandic horse world endeavours to create a culture of openness, a willingness to listen, and a safe space in which points of concern can be raised. FEIF encourages stakeholders to dare to speak up and take action on all welfare matters, fostering a community dedicated to the welfare of Icelandic horses.



CLUB UPDATES

There are 12 Regional Clubs affiliated with the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress. To find the one nearest you, see the USIHC website at www.icelandics.org. The following clubs filed updates on their activities this quarter.

ALASKA

by Ellen Halverson

The Alaska Icelandic Horse Association has a full summer schedule of about one clinic a month, with a National Ranking Show planned for Labor Day weekend. But looking for something different to share with the readership of the *Quarterly*, I thought we should go back in time a bit and learn about the early history of the Icelandic horse in Alaska. So I spent a few hours over the last couple of weekends with Jeannette and Bernie Willis.

The early folks who lived up here in Alaska were indigenous people with a nomadic lifestyle of hunting and gathering. In around 1910 a missionary named Sheldon Jackson, along with the US government, started boarding schools for the native children, taking these children away from their families. This was the beginning of the end of the subsistence lifestyle. Jackson also had a plan to bring the native people into the economy. This plan involved reindeer. The idea was that people would raise reindeer like the cattle in the southern part of North America, with people from Lapland coming to teach the locals how to herd them. This was not very successful.

Bernie Willis on his mare, Von frá Nautabúi, at the 2023 Alaska Fall Show. Photo by Bryan Mulder.

Then the Lawrence brothers got involved. They were so successful with their reindeer that they angered the beef industry. So the government said only native peoples could work with reindeer. Another plan, from the University of Alaska, was to bring in Icelandic horses, and the people could use the horses to herd the reindeer. But this also wasn't successful, as the people wanted to be home with their families, not out herding reindeer, even on horseback.

The Icelandic horses had been brought in to Kotzebue, but when the reindeer plan didn't work out they ended up in other parts of Alaska, including Nome and Teller—which leads us to Bernie Willis, and his first sight of an Icelandic horse. Bernie and his wife, Jeannette, were missionaries out on St. Lawrence Island. Bernie was involved then with sled dogs. In 1992 he ran his dogs in the Hope Race, which went between Nome and Anadyr, Russia, crossing the Bering Sound. He remembers seeing two horses, looking very out of place in the tundra between Nome and Teller, standing watching him and his dogs, with snow covering their backs. They were Icelandics.

After the race, Bernie went back to Anchorage and looked up Kevin and Fran Arseneau, who had Icelandic horses, and Bernie had the opportunity to ride one. The Willis family ended up getting two Icelandics from Tacoma, WA. The two horses were very different, and Bernie was curious about that. He went to a horse show in Spokane and met Pétur Jökull Hákonarson, who was judging. This led to an invitation to visit Pétur in Iceland, an opportunity to learn about judging and competition, further education, and becoming a certified sport judge in Iceland.

Bernie has since been to Iceland many times and has helped make connections with Icelanders for people in Anchorage. Over an 8-10 year period, he brought about 25 horses to Alaska from Iceland. Having the animals, caring for them, and using the sled dogs and horses, have provided life lessons for his two sons and daughter, teaching them the joy of labor and the physical world.

The Willis family lived in South Anchorage during the time their children were growing up, and their Icelandic horses played a big role in that neighborhood. Multiple families became involved in an Icelandic 4-H group that met every other Thursday, and once a month Bernie would trailer all the kids and their horses down to an indoor arena to ride. In the summer, there were camps, horse shows, and even a large 4-H camp with other breeds of horses.

All the original children in the club are grown, but Icelandic horses are still part of Bernie and Jeannette's life. Their daughter, Janet Mulder, continues the tradition with her family. This is a connection that Bernie values greatly. Icelandic horses are part of the heritage of his family. And through the Icelandic horse, Bernie and Jeannette have connections in Iceland, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, and Finland.

But perhaps the simple joys are what Bernie enjoys most: just being in the presence of the horses, hearing them welcoming him and chewing their hay contentedly. It's what gets many of us up in the mornings and bookends our days in the evenings.

It is interesting to look at peoples' lives and see how they have touched others. Just think about those horse-crazy kids in South Anchorage who grew up during that time, riding their Icelandic horses up and down the hillsides, gathering together for learning experiences, fun, and life lessons. Those kids benefited greatly from that opportunity, and for some it changed the direction of their lives. Even now, many of us in the AIHA benefit from using the facility the Willises built at their Arctic Arrow Farm for clinics and our yearly show. Some of us have horses that were bred at Arctic Arrow, whom we treasure dearly. So, thanks to Bernie and Jeannette Willis: for their time, knowledge, and hospitality, and for welcoming people in Alaska into the world of Icelandic horses.

Two of Flugnir member Ellen Parker's recent foals, known on Instagram as "The Knuckleheads." The pinto (left) is Rokkur from Avalon, born July 2022; his dam is Viska from Nordurstjarna. The chestnut is Þorinn from Avalon, also born July 2022; his dam is Hugrún frá Hellúbæ. Both foals are sired by Strokkur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum.

FLUGNIR

by Ellen Parker

Greetings from the Upper Midwest. Due to our gentle winter weather this year, many of us were able to continue riding outside on trails and in lessons. We put together our traditional Winter Warmup party at the new location of our wonderful and supportive local tack store. We enjoyed a lunch and a rousing game of Icelandic horse-themed Bingo and Trivia, with donated prizes. After lots of laughs during the "Lightning Round," we collected ideas and made plans for spring and summer activities.

Last summer found many of us hitting the local trails, with some longer trips, and many of us attending shows and clinics. So in the spirit of pushing more group activities and being as active as possible with mentorship and ambassadorship, we came up with a host of member-affiliated activities.

Since it's a Landsmót year in 2024, a couple of members will be flying to Iceland to attend the national competition, enjoy a trek, or pursue clinic and training opportunities. Locally, several members will be hosting open houses and clinics, with obstacle courses and riding demonstrations for spectators and riders alike.

Last year, trainer Katie Livingood created a well-attended series of six clinics to help provide more consistent training to riders. She will offer the same series this year, open to all levels of riders and auditors; it will again focus on becoming more balanced as a rider and having better communication with your horse, and will feature a weekend with nationally known clinician Carrie Lyons-Brandt from Taktur Icelandics in Kentucky.

Several members plan to attend the Breeding Assessment hosted by Harmony Icelandics in Iowa in June, either to have an adult horse or a foal evaluated. The several Icelandic breeders in our area feel strongly that these are critical events to support, in addition to the National Ranking show that will follow the assessments. Our club has several hopefuls attending these evaluation events, so wish us well. In the meantime, we expect that the several foals to be born this spring at our local breeding farms will continue to move the breed forward for US-born Icelandics.

Finally, our Fire and Ice Drill team thrilled the crowds at the Minnesota Horse Expo in April, and brought educational and breed ambassador seminars and opportunities to spectators and hopeful new Icelandic horse owners.

HESTAFOLK

by Lisa McKeen

We began 2024 with a new online membership application, and Mary Chamberlin, our Membership Maven, has begun working on our webpage! We will advertise on our Facebook page when it is up and running. Many changes, which come with many thanks, are in the works.

We love to hear about all the different activities our members share with us: working equitation clinics, competitions, trail rides, and ground work sessions are all in the works. RJ West and Lauren Murphy keep finding Icelandic owners to ride with them in Woodbrook Fox Hunting events. We are finding some working equitation events to attend at local arenas. And we have been invited to host a class at the NW Gaited Horse Show.

We are still doing our monthly Zoom education sessions. The last topic was about using cavaletti to bring your horse back from a long, long, rainy and cold wintery break. Here's to summer!

Hestafolk member Serenity Perigo does groundwork with her horse Bjarki from Extreme Farm (AKA Bear). Photo by Ashley Perigo.

KLETTAFJALLA

by Ellen Lichtenstein

It was a slow and snowy winter here in the Rocky Mountain region, which means a lot of Klettafjalla Icelandic Horse Club members were stuck indoors (when not shoveling out from underneath three feet of snow, that is!). The cold, dark winter gave our members a chance to plan for fun camping and riding excursions starting in the spring, including a trip to Fort Robinson State Park in Nebraska and another visit to Winding River Resort in Grand Lake, CO. There are also clinics being planned at Gyetorp II in Wyoming starting on Memorial Day weekend. While there wasn't much club activity in the first few months of 2024, we're excited about all the opportunities to come this year, with members participating in everything from endurance riding to camping to competitions.

Kappi from Mt. Spokane Icelandics, owned by Klettafjalla member Gail Madsen-Clayton, plays in the arena with Gail's granddaughter Quinn. "The idea is for Kappi to get used to new things," Gail says.

NEIHC

by Jennifer Bergantino

Our club was busy this winter with travel, education (both mounted and unmounted), and just being together. We took advantage of good weather days and found new activities and exercises for the not-so-good weather days.

NEIHC member Nancy Rohlfs on her new mare Sól, with trainer Guðmar Pétursson at Hestaland in Iceland.

Nancy Woods traveled from her home in Massachusetts to Seattle. Nancy reports, "Lucky for me that Laura Benson of Valkyrie Icelandics and Resonant Riding recently settled in Duvall, WA. From our first email to our last hug, 14 lessons later, I loved this woman! It was about eight years ago, when I turned 70, that I started my Icelandic horse journey. After years of lessons, lots of reading, and several Icelandic treks, I prided myself as being not exactly a newbie. I quickly discovered, thanks to this incredibly joyful and insightful woman, that I still have much to learn. Laura taught me how to physically carry out the fine details of riding, including how to properly ask-and-release; how to coordinate the timing of my hand and leg aids; how to keep my elbows at my side; how to do groundwork; how to collect; and many other aspects of equitation, improving my riding and my communication with my horse. The 20-meter circle had always eluded me, and I never fully understood why. Now I've got it!"

Also seen outside of the Northeast was the 21-year-old gelding Taktur from Armason Farm. Taktur, who belongs to NEIHC member Erika Tighe, now lives in South Carolina, where he demonstrates the versatility of our breed and Erika's expert training. Taktur is earning his keep teaching dressage and jumping (his favorite!). Recently he scored an impressive 76.3% in the Intro Test B with eight-year-

NEIHC member Nancy Wood traveled to Monroe, WA, to work with trainer Laura Benson and her horse Stjarni.

old Talia Sawyer.

Nancy Rohlfs ventured to Iceland in March to train with Guðmar Pétursson at Hestaland and ride her new mare, Sól, whom she plans to import in September. Each winter the farm hosts weeklong workshops for Icelandic horse riders to train horses under Guðmar's watchful eye. Several NEIHC members have made the trip to Iceland for this exciting opportunity.

Most NEIHC members stayed closer to home. Sharon Skolnik, who owns four Icelandics, enjoyed some winter rides in only a t-shirt. (Thank you New England weather!) Cedar Tree Stables in Ipswich, MA, had unbelievable luck in picking winter days, hosting two outdoor clinics with Jana Meyer in January and February. Jana introduced the group to some challenging ground and mounted exercises. One of the hardest is getting your horse to straddle a pole, walking up to it and striding along with lateral pairs on either side. Sounds easy, but it takes some practice. The CTS group of eight horses and more riders also enjoyed Crane Beach rides, trails, and the ring, maintaining or even improving their conditioning in preparation for a busy spring. To condition ourselves we went on a "goat hike," making new four-legged friends. If you stop to rest, they climb on your back!

At Ebba Meehan's Merrimack Valley Icelandics in Boxford, MA, many riders attended the FEIF Webinar on "Social License to Operate." The series explored the health analysis of Icelandic horses, lameness detection, horse/human communication, and many other topics, concluding with a panel discussion with professionals from various fields within the Icelandic horse world. The MVI group also took advantage of the gait webinar by Jana Meyer and Alex Pregitzer.

MVI hosted two indoor schooling shows, at which National B Judge Jana Meyer scored the competition and provided comments, helping the riders improve and refine their skills. Each show had 25-30 entries.

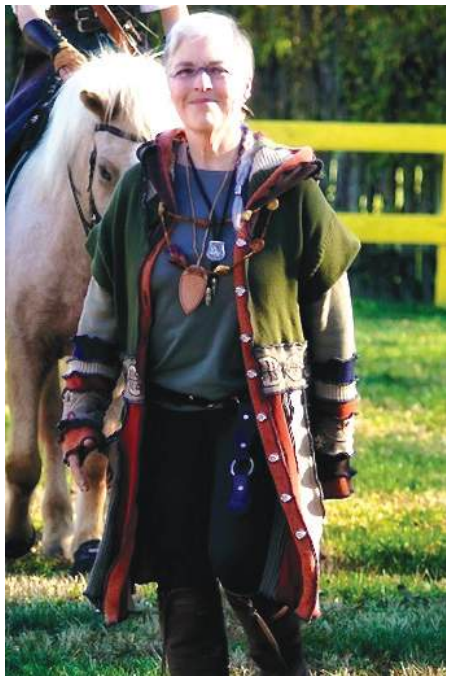
New students, beach rides at Crane Beach in Ipswich, MA, and a clinic with Carrie Brandt in March rounded out the MVI crew's mounted winter activities. Early in March the group gathered off horseback for a Thorrablot feast and to participate in our club's annual Zoom meeting.

Our NEIHC Annual Meeting, led by President Emily Potts and Vice President Hillary Houldsworth, was attended by 40 members at 26 different Zoom sites. Amy Goddard noted that our membership crossed the 200 mark during the meeting, thanks to Ebba Meehan's inspiration! NEIHC boasts 163 adult members and 37 youths. Amy also said the club will be revamping its website, thanks to Amy and Hanne Ghijsen. The meeting ended with guest speakers Jana Meyer and Alex Pregitzer presenting "Spring Training: How to Take Care of Your Horse Through the Changes of Weather."

SIRIUS

by Janet Kuykendall

Shari Wells had an opportunity to shine, along with her heart horse, Andvari from Tolthaven, at the first annual Fenrir Viking Festival in Kentucky. When Shari heard that the Ulfheddin Vikings were hosting the festival, she knew it would be the perfect event to showcase horseback archery on Icelandic horses. She took the idea to her friends in the Archers of Arvak, an Icelandic horse mounted archery club, and the idea won lots of support. Chris Marks was invaluable in helping develop a 45-minute routine, complete with music, costumes, and a variety of archery demonstrations, and acted as range marshall. Lindsay Hillyer volunteered as ground crew.



Sirius member Christine Marks at the Archers of Arvak's mounted archery performance, during the Fenrir Viking Festival in Kentucky.

Members of the Equestrian Achievement Program at Milestones, Inc., where Sirius member Colleen McCafferty volunteers.

Shari Wells on Andvari from Tölthaven takes a shot during the Archers of Arvak's performance at the Viking festival. Photo by Debbie Joplin.

Carly Zaayer kicked off the show riding out with the Icelandic flag, followed by a ground archery segment including Shari's husband Will Wells and several others. The ground archers demonstrated the various shooting positions and techniques archers learn before shooting from the back of a horse. For the mounted shooting segment, Shari, Carly, and several others demonstrated a variety of skills, including rapid shooting, shooting with the non-dominant hand, shooting an archery dummy, and shooting from a canter (see the cover of Issue One 2024 of the *Quarterly*). It was a tremendous success and the Archers of Arvak have already booked two engagements for 2024.

Shari encourages everyone to try mounted archery. She has been with the Archers since their inception in 2020. Shari says, "Mounted archery is a passion for me. It's in my head every single day. I see it as a primal, powerful, and spiritual art form that connects me to my innermost self. Cantering while shooting is the most amazing experience!"

Nancy Radebaugh and her horse Gunnar participated in an intro to cattle sorting clinic in March. Gunnar was, of course, the only Icelandic in attendance. Most of the horses were afraid of the cattle, but Gunnar didn't bat an eye; in fact, he tried to make friends with them! "He reminded me of the little pig in the movie 'Babe,' trying to befriend the sheep so he could politely ask them to move instead of being mean to them," laughed Nancy. "I think it worked, too!"

The participants started out slowly, learning how to properly track the cows, then moved on to pairs. That's when the real fun began! Each cow sported a number on its ear tag. When the instructor called out a number, the rider had to pull that cow out from the herd and drive it across the arena to a particular spot. Then the rider's partner would go after the next cow, and so forth. After a few practice runs, the riders were timed. To qualify, each run had to be completed in under two minutes, without any cows failing to cross the finish line or being incorrectly sequenced. Nancy and her partner consistently had times between 1:10 and 1:30! After the pairs competition, riders then went solo. Nancy and Gunnar had so much fun, they've scheduled a cattle sorting clinic just for the Sirius Club!

This past winter, Colleen McCafferty began volunteering at Milestones, Inc. Located in Independence, KY, Milestones began in 1999 and offers two programs: Therapeutic Horseback Riding (for individuals with challenges such as autism, cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury, spina bifida, and Down syndrome) and Silver Saddles (for individuals age 50 and older).

Founder Mary Lunn is an occupational therapist who combined her career with her love of Icelandic horses. Mary says of her Icelandics, "Size and temperament were their selling points initially. Those qualities have only exceeded expectations. They are so intuitive with the riders and seem to know the riders' needs even before the humans pick up on them. They just seem to know what they're needed to do, and they do it." Currently, there are four Icelandics in the program, along with other breeds, ranging in age from 9 (with 3 years of service) to 36 (with 25+ years of service)!

Colleen described one of her volunteer sessions. On a cool day in February, four horses and their leaders are lined up in front of the entrance to the arena. The horses, partially tacked up, stand expectantly. They know their jobs. Four students enter, one by one, and walk to their tack boxes. They head toward their horses, choosing the curry comb to start the rhythmic, circular motion of grooming while counting to ten. Next comes the hard brush, then the soft brush. They move to the other side, and repeat. They fetch the reins, then clip them to their horses' head gear. The arena has become a classroom.

One child is small, confident, and knows what to do. He's quickly finished and heads to the mounting platform. Another child is exuberant and has difficulty containing his joy, but he eventually gets the job done. One child is tiny, so excited to be here, eyes dancing, still trying to remember the order of things. You just know that she goes home and dreams about horses. The last student needs assistance and encouragement, so he brought along his own helper.

Soon all four are mounted. Each horse has a leader holding a lead rope; each student has a side walker for support. Barrels, cones, and poles have been laid out in the arena, the setup different each week. Each session begins with the caravan of leaders, horses, riders, and walkers going through the pattern. They stop at one barrel to pick out a ball, walk to another barrel to toss it into a basket, then continue the pattern, winding around the arena in gradual twists and turns.

Colleen says, "At face value, it seems so simple, but it's not. The needs and abilities of each rider are different. The goal for each is to achieve as much independence as they are capable of. What is not seen is the plethora of invisible messages transmitting between horse and rider." Colleen, who owns three Icelandics herself, adds, "Riding is a sensory experience that builds strength, coordination, independence, and pride. While riding, each student is stimulating their vestibular, nervous, and circulatory systems. Riding is improving their range of motion, balance, posture, and hand/eye coordination, as well as motor function and the ability to focus and stay on task. The brain is constantly communicating with the body during the session, improving core strength, and building confidence and pride. This experiential process is also meant to build trust and overcome fears."

The Icelandics' manageable size, sensibility, and smooth gaits make them cherished today as they help heal the mind, body, and soul of the riders that attend Milestones. Colleen feels that she reaps as many benefits from volunteering as do the children who are enjoying the rides!

Ómur and Ylfa, graduates of Cornell University's research herd, taking a break on the Dryden Rail Trail.

ST. SKUTLA

by Katherine Forrest

This winter we had an interesting few months of weather fluctuations in Central and Western New York which challenged our horses and ourselves alike! Club members Debbie Noto and Katherine Forrest participated in the Gaits of the Icelandic Horse webinar series presented by Jana Meyer and Alex Pregitzer, which was a terrific way to advance our Icelandic horse knowledge no matter the weather.

Cornell-bred horses Ómur, Ylfa, and Njóla joined up for a successful walk on the Dryden Rail Trail, with owners Quentin, Carrie, and Katherine, focusing on in-hand exposure to all of the stimuli along a multi-use recreational trail.

We are looking forward to an engaging two-day clinic with Terral Hill from Taktur Icelandics, presented by our club at Sand Meadow Farm in Mendon, NY on June 22-23. Called "Building a Foundation," this clinic will be a wonderful opportunity to delve into the essential principles of groundwork, tailored to benefit participants of every experience level. Whether working with young, untrained horses or seasoned, ridden Icelandics, Terral's instruction will aim to cultivate a cooperative, responsive, and confident equine partner ready for any endeavor. Echoing the success of a similar clinic hosted by our club in 2017—which garnered enthusiastic feedback—we are excited to offer this experience once again. This is an excellent opportunity to enhance your horsemanship skills and deepen the bond with your horse. For more information, contact Andrea Barber at toltstar@yahoo.com or 585-624-4468.

TOPPUR

by Virginia Lauridsen

Toppur members gathered March 22-24 to present the Icelandic horse at the Iowa Horse Fair. The weather was chilly, but our team spirit was warm. Eight "Vikings" treated attendees to a demonstration of our very special breed. Complete with costumes and Viking-themed music, the presentation was a highlight of the fair. On Saturday it was hard to find a seat in the stands!

Virginia Lauridsen spoke about the history and special characteristics of the breed, while members Liz Appel, Brandie and Dustin Gean, Judy Hand, Aliya Olsen, and Daniela West all took a hand in the center arena. Of course, we ended with the beer (or rootbeer) tölt! Audiences loved it. We had so many people interested, it was hard to get back to the stalls.

We decorated our aisle with all things Icelandic and Viking and played the video of the gaits produced by the Horses of Iceland marketing cooperative. Our club members were present to greet visitors and distribute complimentary copies of the *Quarterly*.

Now that it is summer, we are all excited to be riding again. At our club's Annual Meeting in January, we planned an event for every month, including a clinic with Dísa Reynisdóttir in May and our National Ranking/Fun Show on June 15-16, with judge Marlise Grimm. We hope to see some of our neighbors then!

Toppur members in Viking garb at the Iowa Horse Fair (left to right): Dustin Gean with Koldimm frá Miðási and Daniela West with Riddari from Bonaventure Farm (both photos by Brandie Gean), Judy Hand showing Pace on Gnyr frá Morastöðum (Christopher Maharry Photography), and Liz Appel riding Djásn frá Miðkoti (TP Creations Photography).

DO YOU HAVE A LICENSE?

by Janet Mulder

What is a Social License to Operate and how does it affect me as an enthusiast of the Icelandic Horse? A Social License to Operate refers to the perceptions of local stakeholders that a project, a company, or an industry that operates in a given area or region is socially acceptable. For an industry to be accepted it must be legitimate, it must have credibility, and it must be trusted.

FEIF, the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations (of which the USIHC is a part) considers these five aspects of the Social License to Operate: Educate, Consider Ethics, Communicate, Be Proactive, and Prioritize Welfare.

HORSES IN AMERICA

The US holds a population of 6.6 million horses. The horse industry, as determined from the American Horse Council's 2023 National Equine Economic Impact Study, shows diverse economic sectors impacting our society at a value of $177 billion. It provides an employment boost, with 2.2 million jobs linked directly and indirectly to the equine sector. With an industry this big, it is easy for business and success to get in the way of welfare and ethics.

There are a few US laws that directly impact the welfare of horses in America.

A proposed law, which has passed the House and was received into the Senate in September 2020, regards racehorses. The Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act of 2020 (H.R. 1754) was designed "to improve the integrity and safety of horseracing by requiring a uniform anti-doping and medication control program to be developed and enforced by an independent Horseracing Anti-Doping and Medication Control Authority."

Soring the feet of horses is prohibited by the Horse Protection Act (PL 91-540), passed by Congress in 1970. It "prohibits the showing, sale, auction, exhibition, or transport of sored horses. Congress found and declared that the soring of horses is cruel and inhumane, and that sored horses, when shown or exhibited, compete unfairly with horses that are not sore."

Horse slaughter is covered by the Humane Slaughter Act of 1958. "It is the policy of the United States that the slaughtering of livestock and the handling of livestock in connection with slaughter shall be carried out only by humane methods, as provided by Public Law 85-765."

Koen Mulder with Kolfinna frá Selfossi at Arctic Arrow Farm in Wasilla, AK. Photo by Bryan Mulder.

In addition to these three laws, there is the National Equine Health Plan, which is published on the website of the Equine Disease Communication Center (https://equinediseasecc.org/national-equine-health-plan). It provides details on transporting and vaccinating horses to prevent spread of infectious diseases.

These few laws do not cover enough topics to provide a Social License to Operate for the horse industry in the US. It's up to breed associations like the USIHC and FEIF to fill the gap.

ICELANDICS IN AMERICA

The USIHC has a Trainers Code of Ethics, which includes more topics to consider for a Social License to Operate. Although it's not required, if you simply own or ride a horse, it may be appropriate for you to consider this document no matter where you fall in the horse industry. (You can find it at https://icelandics.org/usihc-fast-track-testing.)

Under "Welfare of the Horse," the USIHC Trainers Code of Ethics states:

—The welfare of the horse must be considered above all other interests. This includes both physical and mental well-being, which is paramount.

—Trainers should provide the highest standards possible in maintaining horses under their care, taking into consideration the natural needs of horses as herd and flight animals.

—When training horses, and using them for equine activities in leisure or competition, trainers should consider their talent, abilities, and psychological well-being.

—No horse deemed unfit should be ridden or worked. Veterinary advice must be sought if there is ever a question concerning a horse's fitness for the proposed activity.

—Abuse of a horse using natural or artificial aids (e.g., whips, spurs, etc.) will not be tolerated.

—Horses must be transported in a manner that minimizes the potential for illness, injury, fear, stress, or undue suffering, and be allowed suitable rest periods during and following transport.

—Horses must be given adequate food, water, and health care, and properly handled in an environment appropriate to their use, with thoughtful consideration of their species-typical biology and behavior.

—Horses should be cared for in ways that minimize fear, pain, stress, and suffering.

—Horses should be provided protection from injurious heat or cold and harmful weather conditions.

—Horses used in competition, spectator events, exhibitions, motion pictures, and television should not be subjected to the fraudulent use of drugs, non-nutritive agents, equipment, or procedures intended to alter performance, conformation, or appearance.

—Horses shall be treated with respect and dignity throughout their lives and, when necessary, and at the appropriate time, be provided a humane death.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Some ethical questions that often arise with Icelandic horses in the US, and which I encourage you to think about, are:

—Am I too big to ride this small horse?

—Can I keep one horse alone?

—Do I need to have a barn (heated or unheated) for my horse?

—How large of a turnout area does my horse require?

—What feed or supplements does my horse need to maintain good condition?

—How many hours on green pasture provides the best nutrition?

—Is my horse healthy and sound?

—Do I have the skills to interpret what my horse is telling me?

—Is my horse fit enough to do the job I ask of it?

—Is my horse suited for the goals I have?

—Is it too hot or humid to ride my horse?

—Should I blanket my horse while it's raining, snowing, cold, buggy, etc.?

—How cold is too cold for my horse?

—Do I shoe my horse and, if so, with what kind of shoe and for how many months?

In January of 2024, the Horses of Iceland marketing team, in cooperation with FEIF, offered a Virtual Education Series to FEIF Trainers focusing on the Social License to Operate. Included in the seminar were five lectures.

Njáll frá Flugumyri II in a field of lupines at Arctic Arrow Farm. Photo by Melanie Kreiser.

The first was by Michael Weishaupt of the University of Zurich in Switzerland, who discussed many practices that could be improved for the welfare of our horses. These included saddle placement, shoeing practices, the use of weighted hoof boots, and the impact of judges awarding high scores for exaggerated movements.

The second lecture was by Marie Rhodin of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. Marie shared with the group studies completed on how to determine lameness in horses, using electronic methods, and the future of being able to track lameness using smartphone apps.

Guðrún Stefánsdóttir of Hólar University in Iceland provided the third lecture, in which she shared studies completed at Hólar concerning the weight ratio of horse to rider. Interestingly, the data showed that Icelandic horses often perform with rider and tack weighing 25 to 33% of the horse's weight.

The fourth lecture was by Sveinn Ragnarsson of Hólar. Sveinn shared how different people look at different experiences in their own way, and at the future of horses in the ability to help humans with their mental and physical health.

The fifth session was a panel of the experts, who each provided answers to questions from the participants regarding different aspect of horse welfare and the horse industry.

Educational opportunities like this seminar are what will provide our community with the information we need to keep our Social License to Operate. We must continue to learn, and to use that knowledge to change our practices and improve our horses' health.

TAKING IT HOME

My personal experience is that I have competed a little, trail-ridden a lot, trailered tens of thousands of miles, trained and sold a few horses, and bred a few mares. I have made many mistakes and have had plenty of success. I have kept horses for over 30 years.

I have learned that I am a better person when horses are in my life, than when they are not, so I consider them essential to my well-being.

My goal is to provide my horses with their needs so they can thrive. I live in a cold climate (Alaska), where we have winter storms and many weeks of rain in the summer. I provide shelter when necessary, extra hay when it's cold, and dry areas for my horses to stand in when it gets overly muddy. Due to our seasons, my horses don't get green pasture daily; we adjust their nutrition accordingly. My horses live together, unless that is dangerous for one of them; then, perhaps, that horse lives just with a friend through the fence or across the aisle.

I look at my horses for feedback to know if I am providing them with their needs:

—Do they have a shine to their coat?

—Are their hooves growing evenly?

—How is their body developed?

—Do they come to me when they see me?

—Are they calm while I am working with them?

—What could I do better?

This feedback from the horse is wonderful, but it is not a Social License to Operate. I need feedback from my community:

—Do people smile when they see my horses?

—Do they have nice things to say about them?

—Do they ask questions and want to learn more?

Luckily, my community is supportive of my horse life. Neighbors and community members often tell me that I have a beautiful horse. They stop by to say hello and like to meet the horses when we are out together. I have had visitors say things like, "You have such a nice barn," "Your horses really love you," "I can tell you have a real passion for the Icelandic Horse," and "How can you take such willing horses and make them so easy to ride?" This is my Social License to Operate, giving me the legitimacy, credibility, and trust that I am doing right by my horses in a way the community around me can see it.

As an Icelandic horse enthusiast, you may be taking your very first lessons, leasing a horse, riding the trails or at small events; you may own a horse or a few, breed a little, breed a lot, train horses, teach lessons, compete nationally or internationally, participate in mounted archery, drive with your horse, etc.

It doesn't matter how deeply involved you are with the horses. What matters is that you continue to educate yourself, consider the ethics, be proactive, prioritize horse welfare, and communicate with your community. Keeping horses relevant in society will make society a better place—and the horses deserve it.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

by Barla-Catrina Isenbügel & Susanne Fröhlich

To be allowed to practice an equestrian sport, you have always needed acceptance from your society, that is, you've needed to have a Social License to Operate.

But nowadays, more questions are being asked and knowledge and information are spreading more quickly via new media channels. These social changes do not only affect equestrian sports. The Social License to Operate is being questioned in many other arenas, such as the oil industry, intensive livestock farming, and much more.

Social acceptance changes over time. What was accepted many years ago, might not be acceptable today. Traditions that were long practiced in certain cultures, such as bullfighting, are now being questioned.

Looking into the future, we must ask ourselves: What do we find acceptable in our sport, and what does science tell us? If we remain alert, are open to debate, and actively participate in the discussion, we can show the world that we are serious about changing things for the benefit of horses.

It is everyone's responsibility to uphold the highest standards of horse welfare and horsemanship, no matter what discipline we are involved in. Even one bad example, as we've seen in the dressage and show jumping scenes, can affect the reputation of the entire horse world. A horse is still a horse, and only if we Icelandic horse riders participate in the discussion can we make a difference.

In collaboration with FEIF, researchers from the Department of Equine Science at Hólar University in Iceland weighed competitors at the 2023 World Championships for a study of the body weight ratio of riders to horses.

FOCUS OF FEIF

So far, Icelandic horse sports have not been publicly attacked, as has happened at show jumping competitions in the Netherlands, for example, where animal rights activists went onto the showgrounds and disrupted the competitions.

We in the Icelandic horse world benefit from the fact that FEIF, the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations (of which the USIHC is a member), has been taking horse welfare seriously for many years. The last two international FEIF conferences focused on the Social License to Operate and on the Welfare of the Horse, and horse welfare is a key part of the FEIF mission, which reads, in its entirety:

—To promote the Icelandic horse, a positive riding culture, and international cooperation.

—To ensure horse welfare and harmonious riding in everything we do.

—To set the highest standards for breeding pure Icelandic horses.

—To be guided by research and evidence-based learning.

—To maintain a culture of respect, inclusiveness, and diversity.

—To be flexible and forward-thinking in an ever-changing world.

FEIF committees invest a lot of time in bringing together scientific findings and empirical data, and in continuously adapting our regulations to fit these new findings. It has been the intention of FEIF for many years to act proactively, to engage in discussions, and to incorporate scientific findings into the training and further education of judges, trainers, and riders.

GUIDELINES

The FEIF guidelines for sport and breeding judges are revised and improved every year. (You can download the most recent regulations, updated in April 2024, here: https://www.feif.org/feif/documents/.) These guidelines govern most Icelandic horse competitions around the world, in-

cluding all National Ranking competitions in the US, as well as all World Ranking competitions and Breeding Shows. The following are several specific examples of changes made to these guidelines in the last 20 years to further the welfare of the horse:

Our guidelines for sport judges were completely revised in 2015 to use a system of "firewalls" for various key elements, such as horsemanship skills and the connection between rider and horse; rhythm and balance; and suppleness, form, and movement; as well as correctness and accuracy in executing the test. In addition, the rider's technique, balance, and coordination are included in the assessment of the performance. The riding style should be characterized by lightness and sensitivity, not by power or excessive pressure. An impressive-looking horse can no longer receive high marks if these key elements are not correct. All key elements must be taken into account when determining the score. A good performance in one area cannot compensate for serious deficits in another area.

According to the 2024 Sport Judges Guidelines, "The prime judging criterion should be the harmony between horse and rider. The rider must handle the horse with fairness, delicacy, and respect; be its true leader rather than its dominator. At all times the rider must put the horse's welfare paramount and guard its health and safety. The horse should be able to fulfill its tasks with pleasure; be calm and supple, but also confident, attentive, and keen."

In the 2024 guidelines, the last firewall for Riding Skills/Connection has been moved back, so that it now lies between 7.5 and 8.0. This means that a rider can now only score 8.0 or above if the presentation clearly shows "harmony, very good connection, excellent riding." A presentation which is judged as "generally good riding style, horse generally submitting to the aids" can now only get a 7.5 maximum score.

The so-called "blood rule" has been in force for several years. This rule states that as soon as an actively bleeding injury is detected during the inspection of a competing horse, a disqualification is issued. At the 2005 World Championships, we started looking into the mouths of the horses during the standard equipment checks, and since then we have implemented this mouth check at all competitions at all levels. To ensure the checks are uniformly carried out, we have created standardized forms to fill in for every check of each horse after it has competed. The form now includes all injuries or deviations in the mouth, as well as on the whole body of the horse.

Equipment issues are continuously discussed at all levels of FEIF, and our regulations are adapted accordingly. In 2023, for example, our equipment regulations were fundamentally changed, and a list of permitted equipment now applies (see www.feif.org/equipment). This list prevents the use of new bits that have been invented to circumvent the previously prohibited bits. In addition, the Noseband Taper Gauge recommended by ISES (the International Society for Equitation Sciences) is currently being used to check the tightness of the noseband of the horse's bridle.

Strict rules apply to the permitted length of hooves, the thickness of horseshoes, and the weight of protective hoof equipment. Over 10 years ago, FEIF supported its first hoof study (see the article in this issue), which led to a change in our regulations after a higher risk of injury to horses with longer hooves was scientifically proven. Additional hoof studies by some of the same researchers were reported on at the 2024 FEIF Conference.

The structure of our competitions themselves has also been adjusted. Breaks were recently introduced into the final rounds of sport competitions in order to give the horses a rest period between the tasks. At the latest annual FEIF Sport Committee meeting, a proposal to reduce the number of permitted starts per competition day and horse, depending on the age of the horse, was approved; this change will be included in the regulations as soon as the full FEIF Delegates' Assembly confirms it next year.

WEIGHT STUDY

The question of rider weight, in terms of the resilience of the Icelandic horse, is currently under study. In 2017, papers on the topic were published in the European journal *Animal*, authored by members of the Equine Science Department at Hólar University College in Iceland, in cooperation with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala (SLU). (See the article in Issue Three 2017 of the *Quarterly*.) Further work was reported on at the 2024 FEIF Conference.

A horse's resilience, it is clear, is as individual as the horse itself and depends on many different factors. In addition to the body weight and size of the horse, these factors include: age, level of training and muscular condition, gaits, ridden speed, and the conformation of the horse. The balance and riding style of the rider also play a decisive role. Still other factors, apart from the horse and rider, have an influence on the weight-bearing capacity of the horse, such as: the type of use, the duration and intensity of the riding activity, and even seemingly unimportant factors such as the weather, season, and soil conditions.

The rider's weight is a very complicated issue. It is very important that horses do not carry weights that are too heavy for them, but to find exact rules to fit all shapes and sizes of horses and riders is not easy. It is tempting to say that a rider should not weigh more than x% of the horse's weight, but this does not take into account, for example, whether the horse is overweight. An overweight Icelandic horse is less able to carry a heavy rider than is a correctly conditioned, but lighter horse. The conformation, fitness, and training levels of the horse all play a role.

Research about this topic is ongoing, and evidence-based results will be used in the development of our future rules, recommendations, and guidelines.

The FEIF breeding goals for Icelandic horses will continue to put a clear empha-

Hoof length is measured at all FEIF competitions and horses with overlong hooves are disqualified.

sis on a strong, broad, and well-muscled back, with strong and broad loins, and on robust legs with well-developed joints and bones. These are points which, according to our current knowledge, have a great influence on the resilience and carrying weight-bearing ability of a horse.

SPEAK UP

If you witness inappropriate training methods or rough riding in Icelandic horse sports, how do you react? Unsuitable practices and inappropriate behaviors can be found in all walks of life. We do not know what goes on behind the closed doors of every barn or arena in which an Icelandic horse is ridden, so we cannot say that it does not happen in our world.

In order to reach every rider—even those who do not participate in competitions governed by FEIF rules and regulations—the continuous education of Icelandic horse riders at all levels, as well as all trainers and judges, is of paramount importance. Our goal is to make bad practices, improper methods, and inappropriate riding less and less acceptable.

One advantage of having a relatively small and strictly regulated horse community is that concerns like these can be brought directly to the attention of judges, national sport or breeding leaders, or sport or judging committees. At Icelandic sport competitions and breeding shows, stewards and judges are empowered to watch out for undesirable practices—including those that take place behind the scenes—and report them. Ringmasters and judges have the authority to issue warnings for rough riding, to award lower scores, or to disqualify riders if they observe such behavior.

It is not so easy to regulate inappropriate riding or training methods at the leisure riding level. Here, our aim is to encourage regular and appropriate training, discussion, and a strong sense of belonging to a positive, well-educated, and responsible equestrian community.

WHAT IS NEXT?

FEIF Rules and Regulations are constantly evolving, and are—as far as possible—informed by scientific research. It is important to FEIF that good riding practices and horse welfare are not only the focus at high-level sport competitions and international breeding shows (where we have quite a lot of influence and control), but that advances in these areas are also embraced by leisure riders, through their training and understanding of the horse's needs, in all parts of the FEIF world.

Many measurements were taken at the World Championships for the FEIF-sponsored study on the Icelandic horse's resilience and ability to carry heavy riders.

For FEIF, the Code of Conduct of FEI (the Fédération Équestre Internationale) applies at all levels of Icelandic horse riding. That code states that everyone involved must accept that the welfare of the horse is paramount, and that the welfare of the horse must never be subordinated to competition or commercial influences. This code applies not only to riding at competitions or during training, but also to horse keeping, the health of the horse, transportation, and the use of training aids.

We must tackle the challenges together and each of us—everyone involved with Icelandic horses in any way—must lead by example, be proactive, and make the welfare of the horses our top priority. There is a lot to do. Let's tackle it together, for the good of our (Icelandic) horses!

RESOURCES

FEIF Hoof Study Press Release: https://www.feiffengur.com/documents/press_release2014.pdf

Waldern, N.M., et al., 2013. Effects of shoeing on limb movement and ground reaction forces in Icelandic horses at walk, tölt, and trot. *Veterinary Journal* 198 (Suppl 1):e103-108. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24360730/

Weishaupt, M., et al., 2013. Effects of shoeing on intra- and inter-limb coordination and movement consistency in Icelandic horses at walk, tölt, and trot. *Veterinary Journal* 198 (Suppl 1):e109-113. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24345777/

Stefánsdóttir, G.J., et al., 2017. The effect of rider weight and additional weight in Icelandic horses in tölt: Part I. Physiological responses. *Animal* 11(9):1558-1566. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5561439/

HOOF HEALTH

by Gabriele Meyer

The keynote speaker at this year's FEIF Conference in Luxembourg was Mike Weishaupt, a veterinarian and senior researcher at the Equine Hospital of the Vetsuisse Faculty, University of Zurich, Switzerland. Mike has a special interest in equine sports medicine and gait biomechanics. In his talk, he summarized the results of research he and his team of scientists have conducted during the last 10-15 years.

The talk consisted of two sections, one focusing on the shoeing of Icelandic competition horses and its effects on hoof health, the other describing the influence of shoeing on horses' movement biomechanics. Mike's slides for both sections are available online (see the link below). In this article, I will report on the first section, on hoof health.

The reason for putting shoes on a horse's hooves is to prevent excess wear on the hoof material, which would make any horse sore. For some horses, shoes may be needed for other medical reasons. In the gaited horse world, shoeing can help the horse to find a better balance in its four or five gaits. Riders have also figured out that certain shoeing techniques—in particular the combination of long front hooves with heavy shoes and possibly boots—can make a horse's leg movements larger and more expressive, qualities which have been rewarded with higher scores in competitions. FEIF has recognized this and has implemented—and regularly updated—rules for competition shoeing geared to prevent excessive hoof lengths and to limit the weights of shoes and boots.

In the 2010s, Mike and his team of scientists and veterinarians became interested in learning whether the FEIF shoeing rules in effect at the time were adequate and how the then-applied trimming and shoeing techniques—especially those used in competition—affect a horse's hoof health. The researchers examined 133 randomly selected horses at four major Icelandic breeding and sports competitions, all of which took place in 2012: The International FEIF Breeding Show in Herning (DK), Landsmót (IS), the Nordic Championship in Eskilstuna (SE), and the Mid-European Championship in Wehrheim (DE). They measured the hoof dimensions of each horse and visually assessed limb conformation and hoof balance. They also took radiographs and determined various parameters related to hoof balance using state-of-the-art software.

Measuring the hoof wall length with calipers. Hoof lengths over 9.0 cm are highly associated with hoof pathologies. Photo by Sigurður Torfi Sigurðsson.

They found that very few of the competition horses had a front limb conformation that could be considered straight. The vast majority (89%) exhibited a toed-out conformation (external rotation of the carpus, combined with an internal rotation at the level of the fetlock), while 69% of the horses were knock-kneed (offset at the carpus).

In the hind limbs, about 75% of the horses were cow-hocked. Traditionally, a cow-hocked conformation is thought to help with the tölt, as the hind hooves are less likely to strike the diagonal front hooves during the diagonal two-leg stance phase.

HOOF-PASTERN AXIS

As we learned in the USIHC hoof webinar last year (see Issue Two 2023 of the *Quarterly*), the hoof-pastern axis (HPA) is a crucial parameter to consider when shoeing horses. In theory, a straight hoof-pastern alignment is both a goal and an indicator of correct shoeing. The term "broken back" describes when the dorsal hoof wall is at a more acute angle than the pastern, and "broken forward" is the opposite.

Only a minority of the competition horses in the study conformed to the ideal of a straight HPA (17%). The vast majority had at least one limb that was either broken back or broken forward. Incorrect HPAs were detected almost equally in front and hind hooves, and broken backward was seen much more frequently than broken forward.

A non-aligned HPA is more than a cosmetic issue. A broken-back HPA leads to a cranio-dorsal (toe to heel) imbalance of the hoof, with a greater part of the hoof being in front of the hoof's center of rotation. This pathology can frequently be seen in hooves with a so-called "long toe, low heel" distortion and can be due to poor hoof conformation or poor trimming. A longer toe results in a longer lever arm in the hoof, and delays the breakover during a stride. This increases the forces on the

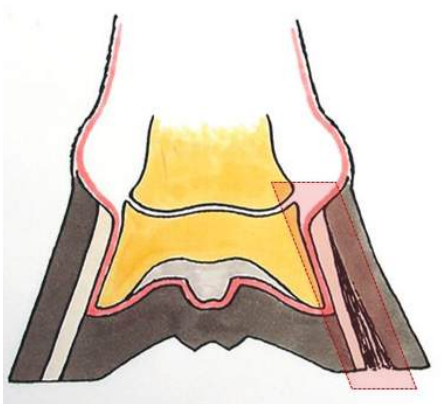
hoof structure itself, especially on the deep digital flexor tendon in the back of the leg and on the navicular bone. If this situation persists, it leads to a chronic condition known as "navicular syndrome," which presents as a variety of symptoms.

THE COFFIN BONE

To put the researchers' findings into context, we need a few explanations. While the HPA is an external marker of hoof anatomy, we are now going a layer deeper and taking a look at the bone inside the hoof via x-rays. The coffin bone (also known as the pedal bone, P3, or distal phalanx) is the bottommost bone in the front or rear leg of the horse. It is enclosed by the hoof capsule, which is made of horn. The bottom edge of the coffin bone makes a certain angle with the ground. This angle can be "positive" (the coffin bone is tipped slightly forward) or "negative" (the coffin bone is tipped backward).

The first notice any horse owner usually takes of the coffin bone is when her horse has sore feet and is being x-rayed to determine if it has laminitis. In this case, the coffin bone will be tipped forward, so that the angle it makes with the ground is greater than what is considered a normal +2 to +4 degrees. If, however, the angle is less than +2 to +4 degrees, or is negative (tipped backward), that is not good either. It puts increased strain on other hoof structures and can lead to lameness due to hoof damage and pain in the muscles and tendons above. In a front hoof, a backward-tipped coffin bone is said to have a negative "palmar" angle; in a hind hoof, it's called a negative "plantar" angle.

Back to the researchers' results: The coffin bone angles measured for the competition horses in the study varied greatly. For the front hooves, they were between +14 and -1 degrees; for the hind hooves, they were between +12 and -5 degrees. On average, the angles were higher than normal; in some cases, the deviation was extreme. In other words, only a minority of the competition horses exhibited normal palmar or plantar angles of the coffin bone, with some of them showing pathological angles.



A flared hoof wall (pink shaded area in the drawing) can lead to a stretched white line—the entry point for bacteria that cause white line disease. From Weishaupt et al. (2024).

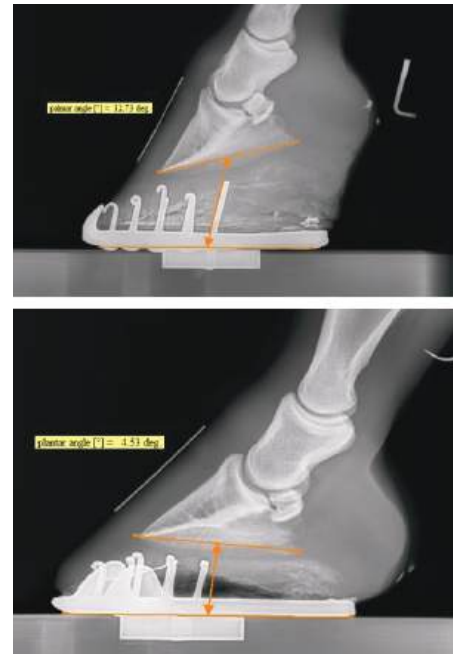
FLARES

A re-shoeing was recommended for 72% of the competition horses, because they exhibited hoof imbalances, flares, shoeing errors, loose or grown-over shoes, and/or subjectively too-large hooves.

A flared hoof wall is one of the most commonly found deviations from a normal hoof shape, and the competition horses studied were no exception. An astounding 90% of the horses examined had a flare in at least one front hoof, and 81% had a flare in at least one hind hoof.

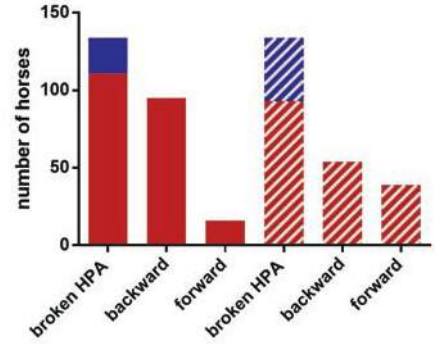
Flares are deformations of the hoof capsule and can be noticed as areas where the hoof wall is bending outward. Flares mostly occur in the lower region of the hoof wall, where it makes contact with the ground. Flares can develop mechanically due to several reasons, most frequently by any kind of hoof imbalance, such as hoof walls that were left too long or a long-toe hoof conformation. Flares can also develop due to metabolic or hormonal problems like laminitis. A flare is always a red flag. It indicates that there is a problem inside the hoof capsule.

Flares have consequences. They can lead to a stretched white line, which can become the entrance point for bacteria that cause a dreaded hoof condition called white line disease. Most importantly, flares generally weaken the laminae, which make a thin layer of tissue in between the inner hoof wall and the coffin bone. The laminae can be thought of as a kind of "hoof Velcro," sticking together the inside of the hoof wall with the coffin bone. They suspend the coffin bone (and with it, the whole horse) inside the hoof capsule. It is easy to imagine that there are a lot of forces involved, even if the horse is just standing, and even more if it is moving fast, and that any damage to this structure should be avoided at all cost.



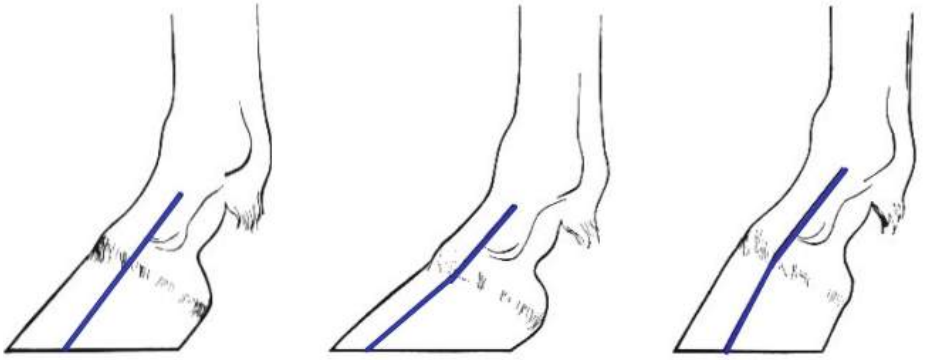
These x-rays show the palmar or plantar angle of the coffin bone. In the upper x-ray, the coffin bone is tipping forward; in the lower x-ray, the coffin bone is tipping backward. Both are incorrect. Illustration from Weishaupt et al. (2024).

The competition horses studied



This chart shows the prevalence of incorrect hoof-pastern angles (HPA) in Icelandic competition horses. Key: Red=incorrect HPA, blue=correct HPA; solid=front legs, hatched=hind legs. From Weishaupt et al.

showed a number of other hoof pathologies. Uneven heights of the hoof walls at the quarters were the second leading cause of hoof deformations; that condition was found in almost 75% of the horses. About 20-25% of the horses exhibited hooves with growth rings, uneven coronary bands, uneven heel bulbs, or horn cracks. Atrophied frogs and contracted heels showed at lesser frequencies (about 5%). These deformities are more than an aesthetic problem—they can have severe consequences. Uneven heel bulbs and uneven coronary bands, which occurred frequently in the horses studied, are of special concern.



The alignment of the hoof and pastern angles (HPA) is an indicator of correct trimming and shoeing. Key: Left=correct HPA, Center=broken back HPA, Right=broken forward HPA. From Weishaupt et al. (2024).

CONCLUSIONS

In a last step, the researchers looked at the relationship between the hoof deformities they saw and the horses' dorsal hoof wall length. They found that most horses with a dorsal hoof length of 8.0 cm exhibited a standard hoof conformation. Dorsal hoof lengths of 9.0 cm or more were highly associated with hoof pathologies.

Mike and his team concluded that the dorsal hoof wall length appears to be a suitable parameter that can be used in show regulations to assess and limit the horses' hoof size, because it correlates to the prevalence of hoof pathologies. It also has a significant influence on limb loading and movement, which he discussed in the second part of his presentation at the conference, and which we will report on in a future issue of the *Quarterly*.

The horses assessed in 2012 were all shod according to the FEIF rules in effect at that time. Despite following the rules, the majority exhibited one or several hoof parameters that were not on par with what is considered to be best practices in horseshoeing. As our knowledge of hoof health has evolved, so have the FEIF rules. Based on the results of the studies undertaken by Mike Weishaupt and his colleagues, FEIF took action: The current regulations state that the dorsal hoof wall cannot exceed 9.0 cm (9.5 cm for horses taller than 145 cm).

The general public, as well as horse owners, are increasingly scrutinizing any horse's living and training conditions—as the discussions about equestrians' social license to operate, featured in this issue, have shown. Whether you compete or not, the results of this research will help you understand that the FEIF shoeing rules exist for a reason and that they are informed by science, not set arbitrarily. They also provide excellent "official" guidance for amateur owners. We should make it our business to monitor our farrier's workmanship for quality and correctness, instead of simply delegating the responsibility for our horses' hoof health to someone else.

RESOURCES

FEIF Hoof Study Press Release: https://www.feiffengur.com/documents/press_release2014.pdf

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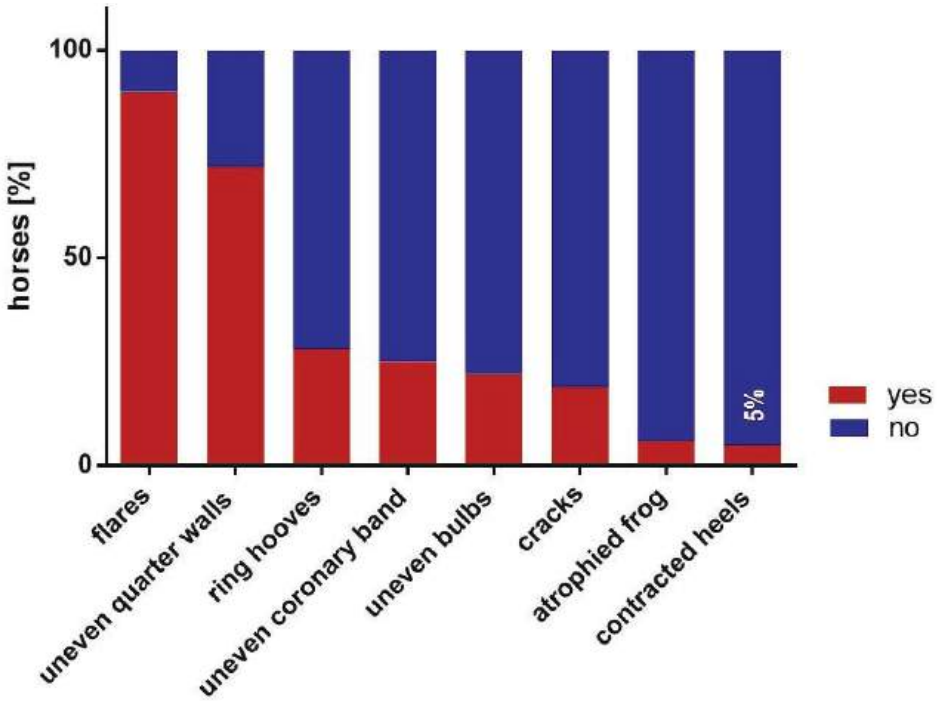

This chart shows the prevalence of different hoof pathologies in Icelandic competition horses. From Weishaupt et al. (2024).

Eyes On Young Horses

by Ellen Lichtenstein

Where would the Icelandic horse be without the hard work of those dedicated to the highest standards of breeding? Certainly not where it is today, with a reputation as a healthy, hardy, all-around sport and pleasure horse across the world. Known for its incredible gaits, friendly temperament, and rock-star worthy hair (among many other attributes), the Icelandic horse owes a lot to those who've spent their lives ensuring the best breed characteristics get preserved and passed along.

So, how do breeders know if their programs are producing the results they want? That's where the Young Horse Assessment program comes in. It plays a crucial role in assessing the quality and potential of young Icelandic horses (from weanlings up to age four), based on things like their conformation, movement, temperament, self-carriage, willingness, and even how they respond to being in an unfamiliar environment.

These assessments provide valuable insights for breeders, helping them to identify strengths and weaknesses within their bloodlines. This allows them to make informed decisions when selecting future mares and stallions to pair up, and ultimately contributes to the overall improvement and preservation of the breed's most important characteristics.

According to Andrea Brodie, a longtime breeder and owner of Lough Arrow Icelandics in southern Colorado, a Young Horse Evaluation helps breeders confirm what they believe to be true about their breeding program and its offspring. "I've been breeding Icelandic Horses since 1983 and have six generations on the ground, so I pretty much know how good or bad my horses are," Andrea said. "But I was interested in taking them to a Young Horse Evaluation so that an outside qualified professional could assess them against the breed standard and give me even more insights into what I'm doing well or what I could be doing even better."

Dísa Reynisdóttir assesses the filly Dalrós from Lough Arrow II, bred by Andrea Brodie, with help from her dam, Dama frá Árbakka.

Breeder Kat Payne presented Lýra from Stonebird, shown with her dam, Lýdia frá Krakua.

Young Horse Evaluations, now called Assessments, have not been held in the US since 2020. One reason, of course, was the Covid-19 pandemic. "Another issue is that there have been several different styles and rubrics for assessing young horses over the years," explained USIHC breeding leader Virginia Lauridsen, who owns Harmony Icelandics in Iowa. One rubric was developed by well-known judge Barbara Frische and another by FEIF, the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations, of which the USIHC is a part.

However, these two systems have now been combined into an official FEIF assessment rubric, based on Barbara's work with further insights from the genetic analyses of Þorvaldur Árnason. As of April 2024, the results of a Young Horse Assessment can be entered into WorldFengur, the international breed registry.

In the US, anyone can organize a Young Horse Assessment, Virginia added. "They simply need to contact the USIHC Breeding Leader at breeding@icelandics.org. The USIHC will fund up to $500 for a one-day educational event. The organizers must use the FEIF official rubric for a YHA, but they can also just do an educational event." The USIHC will also help them get in touch with a qualified judge and advertise the event on the USIHC calendar.

To organize the Young Horse Evaluation that took place over the weekend of September 29, 2023, Andrea collaborated with fellow Icelandic horse owner, rider, and breeder Kat Payne of Stonebird Icelandics. Andrea and Kat contacted Virginia, who helped arrange for Dísa Reynisdóttir, who would be teaching at

the breeding seminar held at Harmony Icelandics earlier in September, to be the judge. The event, held at the Las Animas County Fairgrounds in Trinidad, CO, also presented an opportunity for attendees to learn from Dísa through presentations and clinic instruction over the course of the weekend.

BREEDING GOALS

Before we talked about the evaluation itself, I interviewed Andrea about her experiences as a breeder for the past 40 years and her philosophy on Icelandic horse breeding.

First and foremost, "You can't ride mane or color," Andrea said. Rather, she explained, the quality of the gaits is her top priority. Of course, having excellent gaits (tölt in particular) means that a horse's conformation is generally going to be correct and they're going to be good-looking as well. So, Andrea explained, you can get a lot of the beauty as a by-product when you breed for exceptional gaits.

Temperament and willingness to go forward are also at the top of Andrea's list. "Training will make them easy to ride, but I don't want to have to 'make' the horse go," she said.

As for what's not important? That's easy: height. Andrea often hears gripes from potential buyers who want to know exactly how tall her horses are. But, she said, "I don't care how tall they are. People complain about me not measuring them, but it's not important." For a breeder who knows that she's producing solid, healthy horses with excellent conformation and a willingness to work, Andrea has confidence that her horses are fit to pair with riders of different shapes and sizes without issue.

ALL ABOVE AVERAGE

Over the last weekend in September, a dozen Icelandic horses descended on the Las Animas County Fairgrounds, along with their breeders and current owners (in some cases, one and the same). Of the 12 horses in attendance, 11 were being assessed as young horses and one (an eight-year-old) participated by allowing Dísa to demonstrate how adult horses are evaluated for both conformation and riding abilities.

For the young horses, the results were overwhelmingly positive, with all scoring above average, according to Andrea. The highest score went to her own Velvakandi from Lough Arrow II, who achieved an impressive 80.25% and the remarks, "Well raised young stallion that shows lots of clear beat tölt and roomy, steady trot with quite good movements. Neck is thick at the throat but quite well carried."

Andrea expressed that, of all the horses evaluated, Velvakandi's score took her the most by surprise. "I left him a stallion mostly because I hadn't gotten around to gelding him yet. And I wasn't even sure I would take him to the evaluation because I don't like how thick his neck is." She said, "He's not my idea of 100% what I want in a stallion."

Andrea Brodie's Velvakandi from Lough Arrow II, at 80.25%, was the highest scoring young horse assessed.

During the Young Horse Assessment in Colorado, Dísa also explained how adult Icelandic horses are evaluated, using Andrea Brodie's horse Hervir from Lough Arrow II as a model.

As it turned out, Velvakandi wasn't just the best horse Andrea brought, but scored the highest overall, leading her to reconsider his potential in her breeding program. And it's all about making the right matches. "I wouldn't breed him to a mare with the same kind of neck," Andrea said. "I'd look for a mare with a near-perfect neck. And that's how you get good animals. You match one with a lot of strengths with one who is as strong, or stronger, in an area where the first has weaknesses."

For Andrea, who says a breeder's top priority should be defining a clear goal of how their horses will improve the breed and then sticking to that goal, the proof is in the pudding. Or, in the Young Horse Assessment, as the case may be. With young horses scoring like this in Colorado, it's safe to say that the future of the Icelandic horse in the US is a positive one.

RESOURCES

To organize a Young Horse Assessment, contact USIHC Breeding Leader Virginia Lauridsen at breeding@icelandics.org. For more information on the current assessment system, see the official website for FEIF foal and young horse assessments at https://icefoal.com/en/.

YOGA FOR RIDERS

by Ebba Salvör Diðriksdóttir Meehan

Editors' Note: Ebba Meehan, the owner of Merrimack Valley Icelandics in Boxford, MA, is not only an Icelandic horse trainer and a Massachusetts Licensed Riding Instructor, she is also a Kripalu Certified Yoga Instructor.

This article is written with the purpose of helping riders and horse lovers become curious about yoga. It is not about you doing a yoga pose on top of your horse!

Yoga is a way to master the art of riding with flow, and to improve the wellbeing of both you and your horse. It is guaranteed to improve your focus. Horses deserve to experience the best seat, movements, and communication from us, their riders. We riders deserve the optimal experience as well. Yoga helps.

I have ridden horses and have practiced yoga since I was a child. Growing up around both was one of the greatest privileges of my life. I became curious about yoga when I wondered what my mom was doing upside down on a sunny afternoon in February; later I came to realize she was practicing her headstand. There was something about the stillness of her practice that I admired. I pursued my own yoga practice, and my life was forever changed.

Ebba demonstrates the Crane. "This pose improves your balance and your ability to focus on engaging different areas of your body at the same time," Ebba says.

WHAT IS YOGA?

The Sanskrit word "yoga" means union. The practice of yoga is to create a union of body, spirit, and breath. By connecting these three parts of our being, we become harmonious in our existence. The goal of yoga is to prepare the body to sit in stillness and meditate. About two thousand years ago, the Indian guru Patjanali created a system of practices, written in the yogic Sutras. These practices include physical postures, breathing exercises, and meditation. Yoga has been practiced for over five thousand years, and humans have been on horseback all over the world for over five thousand years as well. These two ancient practices are incredibly valuable when combined, providing a way to improve the connection we form with the horse.

As equestrians, we aim for mental stillness so that we can experience harmony with our horse, both energetically and physically. In a lesson, you'll likely hear me say "collect yourself." It is incredibly important to have awareness of your body and what you're asking the horse to do. Most of us want our horses to be "collected" and to move better. Our riding experience is greatly enhanced when we are aware of the different parts of our own bodies, and how they are (or are not) engaged. This is one of the main reasons why a consistent yoga practice is beneficial.

Yoga is easy to incorporate into your routine before and after you ride or work with your horse. For instance, you could put your horse in the stall to prepare for the ride while you do a few yoga poses (see some suggestions below). After the ride, when your horse is relaxing, you can finalize your session with a couple of stretches and breathing techniques to take in what you experienced with your horse. You could pause for a moment and reflect if there were "gifts" that your horse gave you, or that you gave to your horse, during your harmonious moments together. The ultimate goal is union and harmony with your horse. This is the foundation of success in holistic riding.

BENEFITS FOR THE HORSE

How we approach the horse is extremely important. All horses need their own time to accept us, the predator. This applies whether you are catching your horse in the field, in the stall, in the paddock, or anywhere. The moment you decide to approach your horse, pause and check in with yourself. The horse will appreciate a calm approach and eye contact. If we are stressed, the horse will very likely sense that energy and become tense.

Mindfulness when approaching the horse is key. A simple way to connect to mindfulness is by following this sequence:

—Breathe: Pause for a second and take one deep breath, in and out. Your breath allows you to become very aware of your being.

—Relax: The breath will invite relaxation to the surface.

—Feel: Notice how you feel in that moment, both mentally/emotionally and physically.

—Watch: Try to have compassion for yourself and "watch" how you feel.

—Allow: Let this experience of feeling and watching flow freely through you and

try not to judge it or to change anything in that moment.

When we practice mindfulness, we give our horses a chance to understand us better. When we act from a place of mindfulness, rather than from forcefulness, when working with them, we find more ease and less resistance. Many of us might have a sense of this already, and that's why we choose to work with horses. Some of us may be new to horses. However, we can all improve our relationship with the horse.

BENEFITS FOR THE RIDER

Everyone benefits from yoga in their own unique way. There are as many yoga styles as there are riders. I encourage you to try a 10-minute yoga practice daily, rather than one hour weekly. The idea is to be consistent, engaging body and breath.

Regular practice will help your physical body by improving your balance while on and off the horse, enhancing your body awareness. It will support alignment in your body and your energy flow. It will strengthen your body, and you will become more flexible.

Yoga promotes the same posture as riding in many ways. You may have been asked by your riding instructor to lengthen your spine, bring your shoulder blades together, and engage your core. Active engagement of specific parts of your body helps your horse to respond. Your yoga practice will increase your body awareness and your ability to control such movements.

Stiff joints and muscles, by contrast, inhibit your absorption of the horse's movement. Stiffness and lack of balance in the saddle will get in the horse's way, causing unnecessary tension and hindering your progress toward harmony. Most of us need more flexibility in the pelvic area, back, and shoulders. Your yoga practice will improve your ability to absorb the horse's movement, tone your muscles, and increase flexibility. This will, in turn, enhance your ability to manage your energetic relationship to the horse. Increasing this very unique connection through spines meeting each other can happen more naturally through yoga.

Regular practice will transform your mindset, regulate your nervous system, and increase your focus while riding, either leisurely or when performing. In yoga, this is called being centered. It is the practice of being "here and now." Every moment is new, with a new breath. I often tell my students at the beginning of a lesson, "Today we have a new human and a new horse." We are simply never the same, nor is the horse. How can we ride effectively if we are not optimizing our physical and mental well-being first?

A consistent yoga practice will help you relax. It can also energize you before you head to the barn, whether to work your horse on the ground or in the saddle. On the days you practice yoga, you will notice your riding feels more effortless. Your horse will feel this too and will respond accordingly. Your energy will be aligned, allowing you to ride in a more harmonious and holistic way. As your yoga practice evolves, your body's symmetry will improve, and your horse's movements will become more even as well.

STARTING YOUR PRACTICE

Here are some of my favorite practices to do in the barn. Please note: Always consult with a healthcare professional before starting a new physical regimen. I begin with two standing poses for strength: Warrior II and Crane.

Warrior II benefits both body and mind. It stimulates and energizes your hip flexors. It strengthens your core and your whole body, improving your balance. This pose enhances your focus; it is a willful pose, perfect before a ride on a horse you might find somewhat challenging.

Crane has the benefit of being both loose and firm. Your center is firm and engaged, and your limbs are loose. This pose improves your balance and your ability to focus on engaging different areas of your body at the same time.

I follow these with three standing poses for flexibility: The standing wide angle pose stretches the back before a ride. The forward fold with clasped hands stretches the pectorals and the posterior body. The Dhristi point or gaze point for focus supports a forward trajectory in travel.

Ask yourself the question, Why do I ride? Become mindful around your horse—and around all living things. We are all on this planet together. How we use our energy is crucial. Our access to the energy is through our bodies and minds. Set your intention for each ride, every day. Yoga will help you get there. Try it!

I would love to hear from you if you are already doing yoga, want to start, or are just plain curious. I love questions! Contact me directly, or send your story to quarterly@icelandics.org to share it with other readers.

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Here, Ebba demonstrates the Warrior II. In addition to strengthening your core and improving your balance, "this pose enhances your focus," Ebba says. "It is a willful pose, perfect before a ride on a horse you might find somewhat challenging."

THE FIRST 100-MILER

by Jess Haynsworth

Every summer in Woodstock, Vermont, the Green Mountain Horse Association teams up with local landowners to host the oldest competitive 100-mile trail ride in the country. It was, in fact, the very first competitive 100-mile ride available to non-cavalry members ever to be held in the US. The rules written for this ride became the rulebook for CTRs (Competitive Trail Rides) everywhere. Once upon a time, riders traveled from all over the country to compete. Today, with more 100-mile rides stationed around the US, the competition pool tends to be smaller, and more localized, but GMHA has managed to preserve the original route.

It was this route that my horse Vigri successfully navigated in 2021 and 2023 (with slight modifications due to flooding). After his first completion, I interviewed Hannah Bright, GMHA's trail director, about the history of the ride. GMHA maintains impressive archives, but we could find no record of another Icelandic horse successfully completing the ride, though several had attempted it. Vigri, we believed, was the first.

Enter Icelandic horse historian Þórgeir Guðlaugsson. While compiling a report on the history of the breed in the US, which he presented at the 2024 USIHC Annual Meeting, Þórgeir stumbled across something incredible: Not only a photo, but a completion ribbon from GMHA 100-Mile Ride, dated 1970. The photo depicted Annie Shields, the "Grande Dame of Icelandic horses" in the US, as Þórgeir calls her—and rightly so, for at only 20 years old she became the owner of the first large shipment of Icelandic horses to come to the US. Without Annie, the Icelandic horse might never have taken root here. This, I knew. But what I didn't know—and what GMHA had forgotten—was that over 50 years before my Vigri completed the route, another equine Icelandic expat had done the same.

His name was Palli. Like my Vigri, he was born and raised in Iceland. Unlike Vigri, who boarded a plane and flew in relative comfort to JFK airport, Palli boarded a ship. He arrived in the US only months before competing in the 100-mile ride, imported by a wealthy American businessman. On the day his hooves touched American soil, he met the girl in the photograph, with whom he would earn that yellow GMHA ribbon over three days of grueling Vermont hills.

When I first saw the photo of Annie and Palli, I unexpectedly felt a lump in my throat. Vigri and I weren't alone. Here was another girl, just like me, who had believed enough in her small, gaited mount to dare to try. Knowing the effort it took to prepare for the ride, and to meet the pulse parameters on an Icelandic horse, I wondered about this team that had performed this feat so long before us: What had their experience been like? How might it have differed from my own?

I thought these would be questions for my imagination only, until Þórgeir offered to put me in touch with the Grande Dame herself. Our conversation lasted two hours, and could have gone on hours longer, easily.

Today, Annie lives in Georgia, surrounded by family, free-range chickens, and four Icelandic mares. Although it was a long time ago, and a full life has occurred in the interim, Annie remembers Palli and Woodstock and all that it took to get there.

THE ICELANDIC NATIONAL VELVET

It all began with a newspaper headline. "I was sitting at the breakfast table and my mother was reading the *Washington Post*," Annie recalls. A businessman called Sam Ashelman had imported a shipment of Icelandic horses—the largest shipment of such horses to the US to date.

"Ashelman…," thought Annie's mother. She recognized the name—a schoolmate of hers named Margaret, from her childhood in England, had married an American businessman called Ashelman—could it be the very same Sam?

A phone call led to an invitation, which led to a visit to the Ashelmans' farm outside of DC, and before she knew it, Annie was face to face with a herd of Icelandic horses, many of the mares already pregnant. "Mr. Ashelman," she asked, "can any of these horses be ridden?" He looked her up and down.

"I bet you could whip these horses into shape," he said.

Annie enlisted a small army of local girls—nicknamed "the saddleites" by her

Riding the same 100-mile route through Vermont's Green Mountains—half a century apart—are Jess Haynsworth and Vigri (at left), in a 2023 photo by Nick Goldsmith, and Annie Shields and Palli (preceding page) in 1970. Jess thought she was the first to complete the GMHA 100 on an Icelandic horse—then she learned Annie's story.

grandmother—to assist her in this endeavor. "I had all these friends, and they were all up for it," she says. "We got bucked off, dusted ourselves off, and got back on."

The improvised training was completed bareback, as Ashelman initially provided no tack. The saddleites found piles of old harness equipment in a barn and managed to cobble bridles together. "We had this babysitting blitz to earn some money to buy bits," says Annie, recalling the looks on the proprietors' faces when a ragtag straggle of teen girls appeared in a chic DC tack shop one afternoon. "We managed to get three snaffles at $12 apiece."

Ashelman was relatively uninvolved and unaware of the extent of the work Annie and her friends put in, but nevertheless, the horses that were old enough to train did indeed become rideable—just in time for most of them to give birth to the foals they were carrying. By that point, Annie headed off to college in Upstate New York, leaving the horses behind.

When she returned to visit them, they were gone.

"All I found was very dried out horse manure and tufts of hair in the barbed wire," says Annie. "I was so distraught."

She went house to house, knocking on doors until she found out where the Ashelmans had gone: to West Virginia, to start a resort. "By that point, I had a driver's license," she says, and off she drove, visiting real estate offices and asking after the Ashelmans. Eventually, she tracked them down and pulled into a magnificent property that would soon become the Ashelmans' vacation resort.

"Hi, Annie," said a cheerful Sam Ashelman, seemingly not at all surprised to find her at his new property. "It was like I was his next-door neighbor coming over to borrow a cup of sugar," Annie recalls. He then informed her that she would be running his new resort's trailride stable.

Before she knew it, Annie had paused her education and brought several of the saddleites on to spend the summer running the trailride business. Ashelman realized the wisdom in turning the horses over to Annie. "He didn't want to own them anymore, but he wanted to have that trailride business," she says. "He finally got to the point where he understood that having 50 horses, you actually have to pay attention to them, you have to take care of them." With her mother's help, she bought the entire herd of 50 head for $5,000, a loan that she eventually paid off in full.

Annie was 20 when she purchased the horses. She ran the trailride stable for five years, and sold a number of the horses, becoming more and more involved in breed promotion. She had one horse which she trained to be a fabulous jumper and famously brought to the International Horse Show in DC. There, she had a booth where she provided information and literature on the breed and managed to network seven sales from those conversations alone—all, she notes, to European immigrants.

PALLI ARRIVES

By age 28, Annie had reduced her herd to just 17 good horses. It was then that fate placed Palli in Annie's life. "Suddenly this very fancy car pulled into the driveway," she says, and out stepped "this man who was just dressed splendidly."

Corrin Peter Strong was the charming, successful son of the US ambassador to Norway. He was used to getting what he wanted, and now he wanted something from Annie: help with a new shipment of horses he was importing in partnership with a number of other New York businessmen. "This was a very wealthy, influential man," Annie says, who still doesn't know how Peter got her name. "I don't mingle with people like that, much."

Before she knew it, she was swept into Peter's world. "I was there to help when the horses arrived on the ship," Annie says, recalling the experience of standing with Peter and his fellow investors, watching the new horses unload. "It was just a money thing; they didn't know anything about horses." One of those horses was Palli.

A lack of preparation on the part of the investors resulted in Annie speeding down the highway to New Jersey with blood samples from each of the horses, a US Customs requirement that had to be submitted by 5 pm. Of course, she was pulled over for speeding. "I was almost in tears," she says, recalling how she tried to explain her confusing mission to the police officer. "I wasn't getting paid for any of this."

The officer was sympathetic, and Annie arrived just before closing time to a bustling building, arms full of blood samples and no idea where to go. Miraculously, someone she ran into on a staircase helped Annie submit the samples just in the nick of time. "Sometimes, angels come down staircases," Annie says. "I never got a thank you from these [investors]."

As chaotic and thankless as it could be, Peter's world was exciting—and full of

Annie's friend Bjorg riding one of Annie's horses, Bruni (back in the old days, before we knew the value of helmets). Bruni was one of the foals from the Ashelman herd.

opportunities. One horse from that shipment sold to the Rockefellers, and Annie was entrusted with delivering the horse. She and Peter drove in a "rickety, borrowed truck and trailer" to the Rockefeller estate, where the family was having a party. "It was like a dreamland," she says. The horse was whisked off to the stables and quickly forgotten, while Annie and Peter were pulled into a surreal game of touch football with the Rockefeller family.

Peter had a knack for making the impossible feel possible. He set his sights on the GMHA 100-Mile Ride as a perfect event to promote his investment herd of Icelandic horses. It's worth noting that in 1970, the AERC (American Endurance Ride Conference) had not yet been founded. Endurance riding as we know it, now a separate sport from CTR, did not yet exist. The GMHA 100-Mile Ride was the absolute cream of the crop, when it came to distance riding competitions in the US, and entering Icelandic horses in the ride was an incredible marketing tool.

Peter obtained a maple syrup operation and sugarbush in Vermont, and moved Annie (accompanied by her future husband) to Vermont for the summer to train for the ride. For Annie, it was a competition on a scale she had only dreamed about. "I'd been in some shorter events around Maryland and West Virginia, but nothing that ambitious," she says. "I'd been constantly with Icelandic horses since I was 14 years old, but my experiences were so limited to that pasture in Maryland."

That summer, she left her own herd in the care of others and set off on the adventure of a lifetime. "Peter wasn't there most of the time," she recalls. "We had this house that we could live in, and we took care of this small group of horses."

Among them was Palli. He was a 12-year-old, four-gaited gelding, black with no markings, and well-built with excellent conformation. "I don't know who picked him out for this race," says Annie, "but he was a good choice." Although he had only been imported months before, he took to his training like a duck to water. "He had a good tölt," she says. "We shifted back and forth between tölt and trot." Palli's breeding is unknown to Annie. "After riding 100 miles on the horse, I was very impressed," she says. "He was well-suited to a race like that."

Annie spent the summer getting to know Palli. By chance, an Icelandic woman named Guðbjörg Sigurðardóttir was also living in the area, and was mutual friends with Annie's farrier. Björg (as she preferred to be called) stopped in for a visit one day, and although she spoke very little English, she and Annie immediately hit it off. Before long, the two were riding together every day, and Björg had moved into the house. "She taught me a lot," says Annie. "She had grown up on a horse farm in Iceland."

Björg was the rider responsible for conditioning Peter's mount for the 100-mile ride (a horse whose name has been lost to memory), alongside Annie and Palli. "I was conditioning Palli by putting a lot of miles on him every day," says Annie. "I think we did an okay job of preparing him."

THE 100-MILER

Annie and Peter both competed at GMHA in 1970, but they didn't ride together. "I wasn't with [Peter], and I don't remember if he finished," says Annie. "His ride was more [focused on] talking to folks as he went along."

He wasn't alone. While the three-day ride included an estimated 120 horse-rider pairs that year, Annie says that not everyone competed with the idea of finishing. "Some were very competitive and they wanted to win and had spent a lot of time getting their horses ready, lots of thoughtful care of the horses," says Annie. "Then, there were other people there to have fun, who didn't even plan to finish the race."

Today, GMHA offers the 100-Mile Ride as part of Distance Days, a weekend of CTRs of various lengths appropriate for all levels of riders, and even a few pleasure rides available for those who don't want to compete at all. But back in 1970, the 100-Mile Ride was a standalone event. The shorter distances are more popular, which causes many to lament that participation has decreased over the years. Annie's insight provides a hopeful reframe; perhaps now, rather than a large percentage of riders not finishing, there is simply more designated space for less competitive riders to enjoy the event.

There have been other changes, too. The GMHA 100 is a CTR, which means that each horse starts on a perfect score of 100, their baseline condition meticulously recorded by vets. Today, horses must pass through vet holds halfway through the ride, in which they are required to pulse down to healthy baseline heart and respiratory rates within ten minutes, and then pass a vet check and jog. Measuring the horse's pulse with a stethoscope and learning how to lower their heart rate quickly enough to pass through these holds is a key part of training and scoring well on the ride. I trained Vigri with a stethoscope in my saddle bag, and staged practice holds on my training rides to ensure that he was pulsing down adequately within the time limit. There are also safety checks performed by vets at other points during each day, and a full vetting at the end of each day, in which the horse's condition is recorded. The winner is determined by comparing the final scores (which takes each day's deductions into account) and comparing those to each horse's baseline. The horse who finishes within the optimum time limit in as close to the same condition as he started is the winner.

According to Annie, back in 1970 the vet checks were unplanned surprises, randomly stationed throughout the ride. "They would hide in the trees, they didn't want you to see them," says Annie. "They would step out and tell you to stop, and give the horse a little physical." Horses had to be bold about this—Annie herself was even startled by a vet who stepped out abruptly. Following the physical, riders would either be instructed to rest their horses, or to retire from the course.

Palli must have pulsed down without issue, but Annie never learned the pulse parameters for the ride. "I certainly didn't check his pulse [myself]," she says. "I didn't need to." The volunteer pulse-takers kept

track of that for the riders, back then.

Another difference in our experiences involves electrolytes. Today they are a key part of any distance rider's kit, and through trial and error Vigri and I have found a preferred brand that contains extra potassium, which he particularly benefits from on longer loops. Annie and Palli did not use electrolytes at all during the ride, and she can't recall seeing other riders use them, either.

While I used Vigri's custom Icelandic saddle for the ride, Annie used a saddle recommended for endurance riding specifically. "It was an English-looking saddle," she recalls. "It was a good fit for my horse, and a good fit for me."

We both alternated between tölt and trot as needed on the trail, and Annie credits Palli's smooth tölt as the reason she didn't particularly feel sore after the ride. "The thing about a tölt [is that] a horse can move along at quite a clip and I think there's less effort involved than any other gait," says Annie. "It's relaxing for the horse, it's relaxing for the rider, and nobody gets worn out."

That said, Palli was "bushed" by the end of the third day, according to Annie. "I was aware of quite a lot of fatigue in my horse by the end," she says. "Going up steep hills at the end of a ride was difficult for both of us."

This, I could relate to. The tough Vermont hills at GMHA take a number of riders by surprise, and the final day has one in particular (now nicknamed "Cookie Hill," in honor of the landowners who meet riders at the top with cookies for the humans and treats for the horses) that stands out in my own memory as particularly brutal. Annie, too, recalled those "big old mountainsides." "I felt sorry for [Palli]," she says. "[But] he always seemed game."

Palli finished 17th out of over 100 riders, an impressive feat in a race designed for larger mounts. "This was all about Morgans," says Annie. "Any other breed was like a footnote."

Palli was likely the first Icelandic horse that many, if not most, of the ride participants and judges would have ever seen. Given that my Vigri created a bit of a stir by finishing the ride, nicknamed "the golden Icelandic" by the judges, I imagine that Palli must have developed quite a following of his own over the course of his weekend at GMHA. "I had quite a few conversations with people who were interested," says Annie. "Just him existing and being in that race was a good commercial for Icelandic horses."

Annie Shields today, at 80 years old, still has Icelandic horses in her life. Here she poses with her dun mare Þrá and her pinto mare Gríma at her farm in Georgia.

So what became of this horse who made history? "I really wanted him to be mine," says Annie. "The conversation about that [with Peter] was very brief."

With Palli out of her price range, Annie returned to Washington to finish her college degree—a goal that she accomplished, much to the dismay of Peter, who had hoped she would stay on to run an Icelandic horse operation for him in Vermont. What Annie had believed was a close mutual friendship ended abruptly, with Peter ceasing all contact after she left Vermont. "I could be bitter about that, but I'm not," says Annie. "I had the time of my life."

We do not know what came next for Palli. Although their partnership was shortlived, he and Annie accomplished something truly remarkable together, a feat that is only made possible by hours spent learning each other's strengths and weaknesses, training slowly over many months. I imagine that Palli never forgot Annie, just as she hasn't forgotten him.

When asked what her favorite part of the experience was, Annie says that it was the connection she felt to other incredible equestrians she met at GMHA. "I remember some delightful conversations with people who had a great love of horses and riding," she said. "Just the experience itself, and feeling a bond with them."

That sentiment, I believe, explains the goosebumps I felt when I saw the photo of Annie and Palli. The bond of shared, mirrored experience, separated only by time, to another Icelandic horse lover, on another horse just like mine. The only other person, so far, who knows what it feels like to finish that ride clipping along in the four clear beats of an Icelandic tölt.

Annie went on to do many more great things with Icelandic horses, and continues to enjoy her small herd at home in Georgia. It is my hope, in sharing this story, that she and Palli will be remembered for their accomplishment and their partnership: as the first Icelandic horse and rider to ever complete the oldest competitive 100-mile ride in the US. Vigri and I are proud to have followed in their hoofprints.

RESOURCES

Read more about Annie's experiences in "The History of Icelandics in America," by Þórgeir Guðlaugsson and Annie Shields, in Issue One 2016 of the *Quarterly*.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

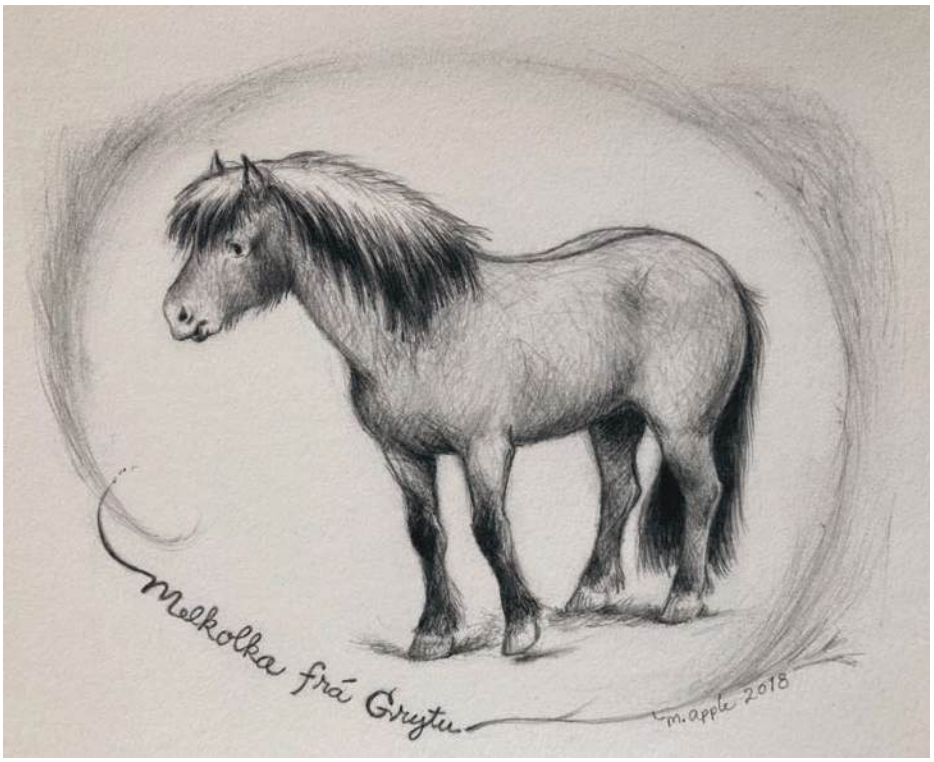
HAPPY WIFE, HAPPY LIFE

As a little girl I always wanted a horse, but we never could afford one, so I worked at my neighbor's farm picking peas, strawberries, and corn and digging potatoes simply to be around his horses. Fast forward to 2012. I had recently retired. My husband asked me, "Exactly what are you going to do with all of your time and energy?" I told him I had always wanted a horse. His reply was, "So, get one!" Seriously, it was that easy. The important point to remember here is the old adage, "Happy wife, happy life."

I took to the internet and researched "horses which will not kill you." I was 54. I had never ridden a horse. Two breeds consistently appeared: the Fjord and the Icelandic. I found an Icelandic horse farm near our home in Vermont and made a phone call which changed my life for the better, forever! With shaking knees, I showed up an hour early for my first lesson and spent the time simply standing at the fence looking at these contented horses. Soon the most beautiful woman I have ever seen came running down the road leading a magical horse behind her. I wanted this to be my life. In less than a month I purchased a gorgeous dun officially known as Melkolka frá Grýtu, but better known as Mel.

My lessons continued and, as I slowly found my seat, I started to form a special bond with Mel. What makes the horse- human relationship so unique? It is all about trust. I trusted her to keep me safe in any situation. She trusted me to care for her well-being. Immensely strong, naturally majestic, and touchingly empathetic, Mel could read my emotions so well. And she loved the carrots and apples squirreled away in my pockets.

The Icelandic barn became my second home. I made new friends to ride out with, and they were very patient with me as I learned to bond with my new love. Eventually my husband realized that unless he purchased another horse, he would rarely see me. So we bought Gjóska, with her long blonde mane, wispy feathers, and ice-blue eyes. What a beauty! Gjóska was the polar opposite of Mel: Ron would drive into the farm and she would come running down from the pasture to see him, while I had to hike as far as possible to find Mel. She wasn't avoiding me. She was asserting her independence.



This drawing of Kim's Melkolka was a gift from her friend Margot Apple. If you have a comment about the *Quarterly* or a story to share, send us a letter at quarterly@icelandics.org.

We spent eight wonderful years riding together in the hills of Vermont on our Icelandics. Ron's grandfather was a horse trainer, so Ron grew up riding. Our lives revolved around our family and the horses.

Then Mel fractured her pedal bone in a freak accident. Three vets told me to put her down—that she would never recover. I simply could not do that. After months of stall rest, during which I cut fresh grass for her and read her books (which she probably found annoying), we were able to go on gentle walks on a lead line across grassy fields. After almost a full year, she was vetted as sound. It was a minor miracle! During that same year I had a hip replaced and now we were both ready to go!

Fast forward to the pandemic. My husband and I decided to move west to be closer to our only child and her family. Utah was too dry for Mel and Gjóska. We felt it would be cruel to make them leave the lush fields and open land to which they had become accustomed. Gjóska found a wonderful home in Maine, while Mel went to a loving one in Vermont. We went to visit them on occasion. Mel introduced riding to many children and my heart was happy knowing that she was content and well cared for.

Sadly, both Mel and Gjóska have since passed. As much as you miss and love your horses, knowing that you gave them the best lives that you could should warm your heart every day.

—Kim Dull, Utah

LET THE FUN CONTINUE

I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed the last issue. I sat down and read it cover to cover. I joined the USIHC about a year ago as a non-Icelandic owner (with hopes of becoming one). I think sometimes the Regional Club Updates can be, well, not relevant. I wonder, "How can I use this information from your club to help my club or help my fellow riders?" But I thought this month's were really good. There was a concentration on specific people (who I don't know), but the information provided was useful to the average joe (me), and not about how way above-average this or that person is. I was

really touched by the Sirius Club report from Janet Kuykendall about Jeff Marks and his wife Chris Stewart-Marks. I keep praying my husband will get into Icelandics so it's something we can do together. This story gave me hope!

"The Hand-Picked Horse" was so wonderful! "Make Matches, Not Sales." I definitely experienced that when purchasing my Ljósfara from Coralie Denmeade at Tamangur Icelandics. I didn't have the budget Chris Willrodt did, but Coralie worked with what I could afford, still making sure it was a good match. It's not all about the money. It's about the two of you advancing together. I've had several bad horse-buying experiences in the past, and this was such a positive and heartfelt experience. I'm completely new to the breed, but completely love them!

Can I also just say that nearly every experience I've had with the USIHC and its people has been so welcoming? I have never felt like this was an exclusive club that only special upper-class people could join. "Of the Herd" is so true! I experienced much the same at Tamangur Icelandics as well! Thank you for all you guys do! Let the fun continue.

—Quincy Sondeno, Colorado

THE HAND-PICKED HORSE

I love how it all worked out and Chris found her dream horse, Heimir. It cannot be stressed often enough that finding the right horse requires a good knowledge of one's own abilities and help from people who take time, know what they are doing, and are interested in a good match. All of this was the case here. Once in a while somebody gets lucky and gets the perfect match without ever seeing the horse. That is possible, but not likely. What I especially love is that Alicia not only found Heimir for Chris, but helped with the transition after his arrival in the US. Difficulties adjusting are not uncommon, and it is so much easier if the horse and rider have somebody to help them ease into their new life together. Thanks so much to Jennifer for putting together this beautiful happy-ending story.

—Alex Pregitzer, Michigan

THE HERD

What an inspiring letter Samantha Tuttlebee published in the last issue of the *Quarterly*! She is waiting for a heart transplant and credits her involvement with Icelandic horses as inspiration to face this challenge. "Every time I close my eyes and envision my future," she writes, "it's of years ahead with Freyja. She is my companion and my courage." I remember watching Samantha and Freyja a few years ago at the 2021 Thor Icelandics clinic in Hudson, New York. This photo illustrates what a lovely match they are. All best wishes to you, Samantha!

—Jean Ervasti, New York

Samantha Tuttlebee and Freyja riding in harmony. Photo by Jean Ervasti.

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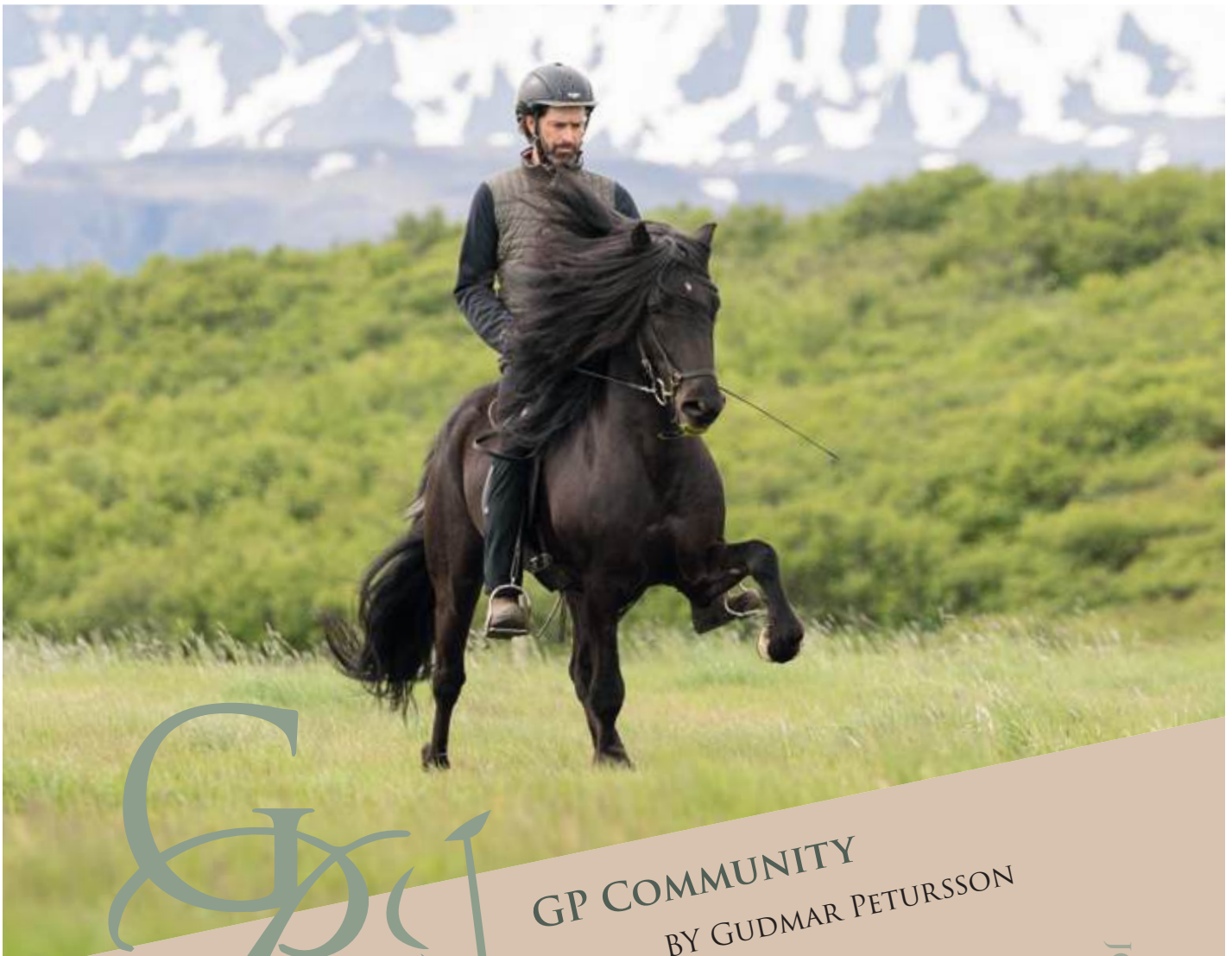

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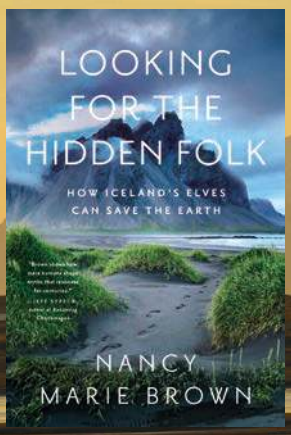

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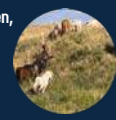

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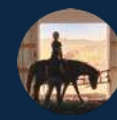

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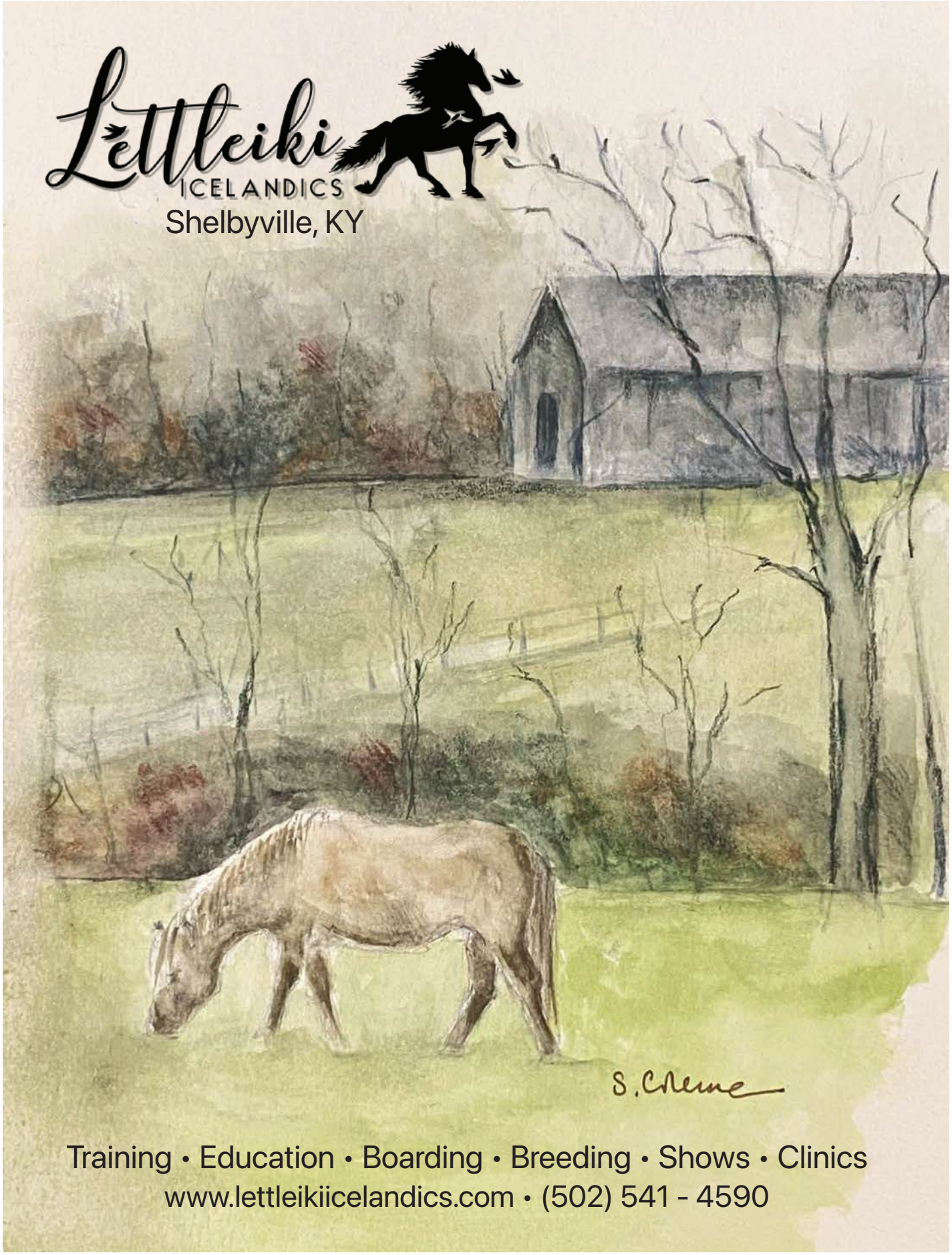
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