Issue Four

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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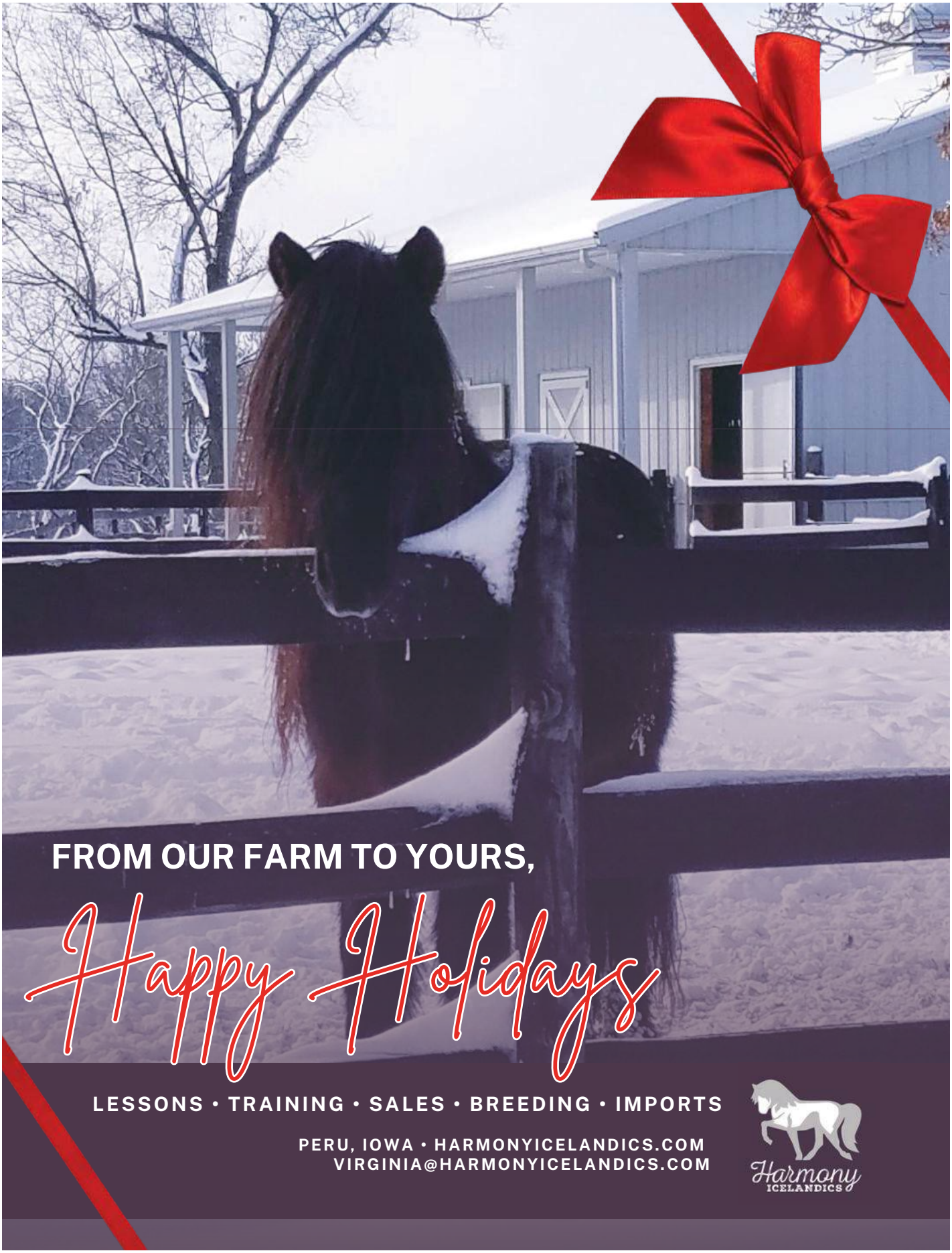
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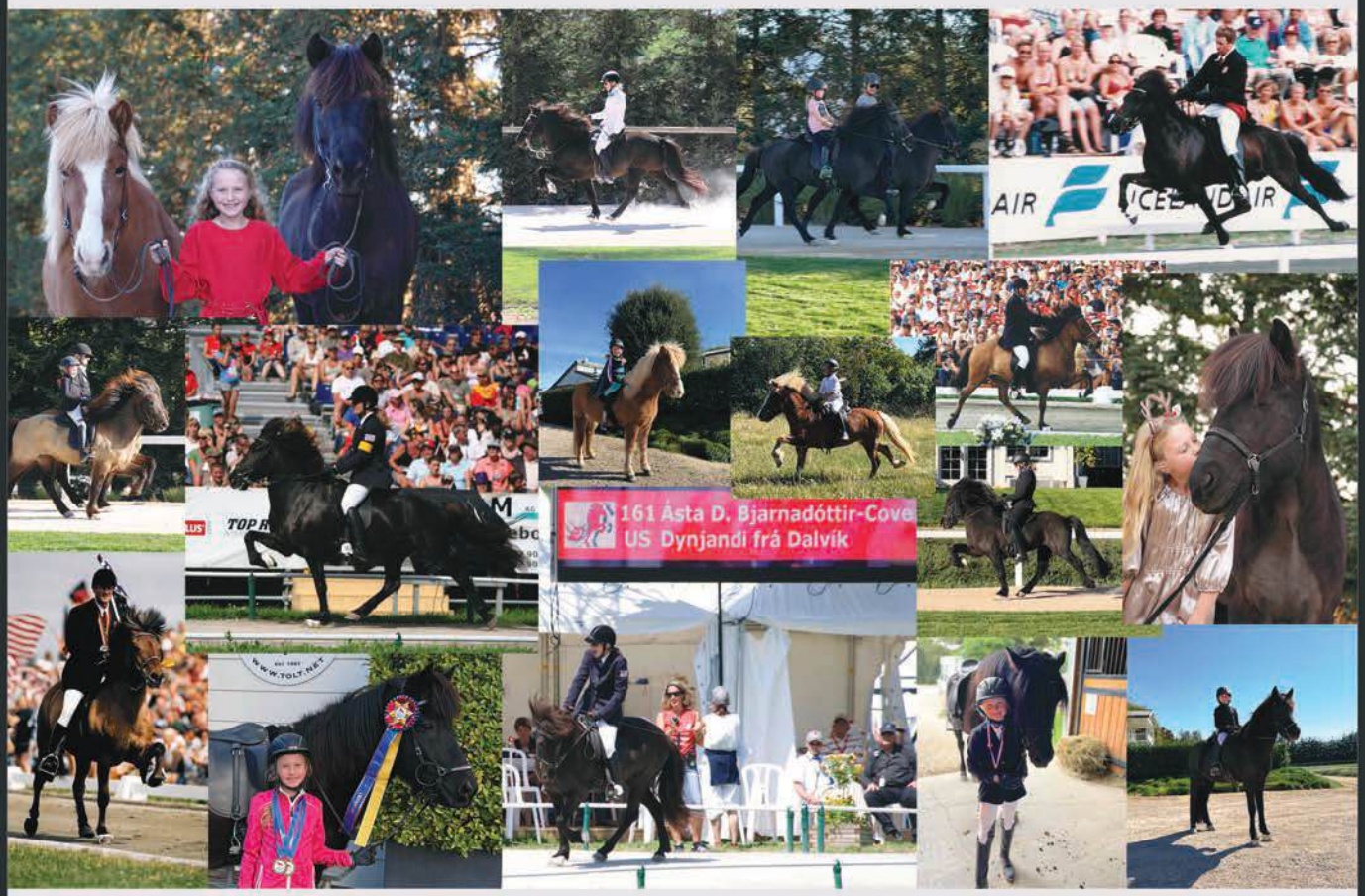


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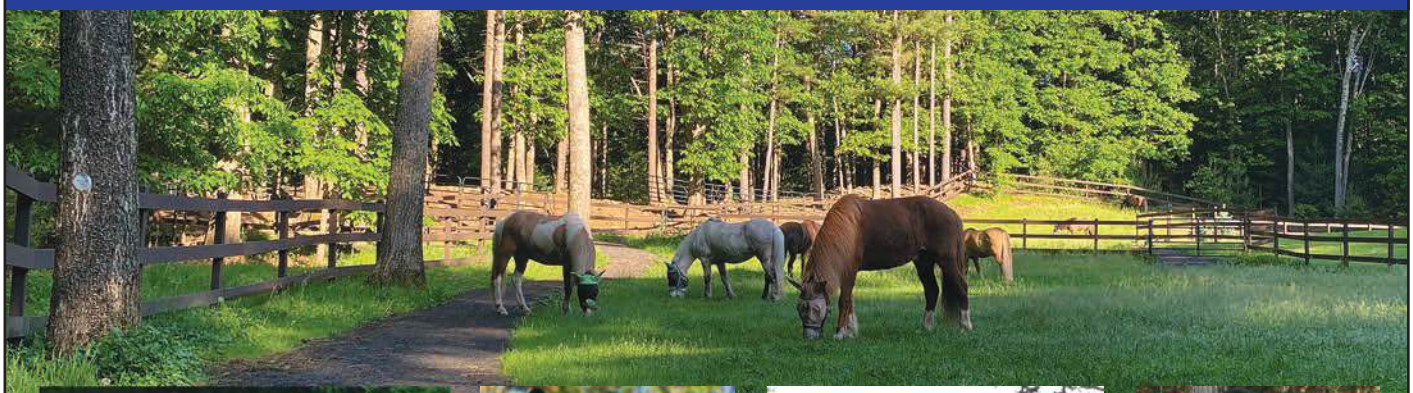

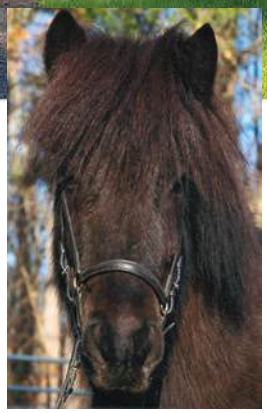

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ICELANDIC HORSE
QUARTERLY
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**On the cover:** Fifteen-year-old Brynja Meehan, competing at this summer's international FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland. She is riding the experienced competition mare, Dís frá Hólakoti (IS2007264005), owned by Martin Rusterholz of Hof Niederfeld. Brynja says she and Dís connected instantly and she greatly enjoyed the wonderful and spirited horse, who nevertheless stayed calm and collected during the competition. Brynja has made the US National team with her horse Amor. Her goals for the near future are to become a better rider, compete as much as possible, and try out for the 2025 World Championships. We wish her good luck! Photo by Lumikki Equine Photo.

**ABOUT THE MAGAZINE**

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**DISCLAIMER**

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# THE USIHC MISSION

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

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

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

## WHY JOIN THE USIHC?

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

The USIHC is the umbrella organization for 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 8 points of conformation and 9 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."

# USIHC NEWS

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

*Virginia Lauridsen writes:* As I near the end of my second year as president of the USIHC, I reflect upon the significant growth of our organization. Membership has increased 17.5%, and we now have over 900 members. We have 12 Regional Clubs providing social opportunities around the country. It is exciting and fulfilling to be part of such a wonderful community dedicated to the welfare and expanded presence of the Icelandic horse in the US. Here are some of the initiatives which have been realized in recent years:

In 2023 we began a Virtual Education series during the winter months. Lectures with industry experts on universally beneficial topics are offered at a low cost to USIHC members through Zoom. Each lecture is followed by a Q&A session. USIHC members may call in or watch the recorded seminars for up to two weeks. This quarter, we will have two lectures. On January 18 at noon EST, Olil Amble will speak on "How to Read a Breeding Assessment and Look Beyond the Numbers." On February 15 at noon EST, the topic will be "The Effects of Transportation on Your Horse: How to Prepare for Long or Short Hauls."

The July Leisure Rider of the Month was Rob Gregory of Kentucky. Photo by Deborah Gregory.

Another exciting development is the fruition of a US Trainer Certification system. FEIF tasks each member country to develop their own unique system based on the FEIF education matrix. Our system has been in development for many years, and several of our trainers have spent countless hours working on it. We started with Fast Track testing for Level 1 in September 2022 and now have six new trainers and instructors to help grow our community. The Trainer Certification committee is currently developing educational modules for future trainers and working on Level ll certification.

2024 marked the beginning of the USIHC Book Club, open to all members. Books on a wide range of topics are chosen by the education committee. Each quarter, a guest speaker discusses the book with participants through Zoom. The Book Club met on November 18, for example, to discuss *55 Corrective Exercises* by Jec Ballou, a comprehensive guide to improving your horse's posture, balance, and body awareness. To join the Book Club, contact education@icelandics.org.

Our Sea 2 Shining Sea program continues to grow and unite our leisure riding community. This year over 100 riders and 20 teams are enjoying the virtual ride. It has built a strong online community on Facebook, with riders posting photos, stories, and milestones. We have prizes for the winning individuals and teams, and it is fun to watch the friendly competition. Next year marks the 10th anniversary and will be a special route. Stay tuned.

Our Youth community is growing as well. Our 2023 North American Youth Cup was held at Montaire Icelandics and boasted 19 participants. The 2023 FEIF Youth Camp in Finland had four riders from the US and the 2024 FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland also had four US participants, along with a team and country leader. Next June the North American Youth Cup will be held at Harmony Icelandics. There will be another FEIF Youth Camp as well, with details to be announced soon. Youth attendance at sport shows continues to grow all over the country. It is heartwarming to see the next generation of riders develop.

The Beer Tölt riders pose at the first annual Nationally Ranked Svöluhagi Klassik show, held in September at Léttleiki Icelandics in Kentucky. Said Léttleiki on Facebook, "We had a great group of riders join us to participate in two days of Icelandic competition with beautiful late summer weather!" Photo by Peter Heiniger.

The Breeding Committee has been working to expand the number of Icelandics in the US and improve the quality of our breeding stock. 2021 marked the publication of the USIHC Breeding Manual to help educate breeders. Since 2017 there has been at least one breeding assessment each year in the US, and the number of participants continues to grow. We have also offered a seminar on breeding every year, either virtually or in person. Breeding is the future, so join the Breeding Committee if you are interested.

Our Sport community has also grown. National Ranking shows and World Ranking shows continue to grow throughout the country, as well as the number of World Ranking scores earned. In 2023, we sent a team of five riders to the World Championships in the Netherlands—the largest team we have assembled in several years. This experience led to the development of our own National Team, which became a reality in 2024. Membership in the National Team offers educational experiences to aspiring competition riders, and future World Championship riders will be selected from the team through tryouts. We are thrilled to have world-renowned rider Olil Amble as our team trainer.

We have developed a virtual Icelandic Horse Sport Education Seminar as a pre-requisite to taking the USIHC Judging Seminar. This virtual series is educational for all riders. The next judging seminar is scheduled for April 2025 at Léttleiki Icelandics.

Finally, our own Will Covert is the current FEIF Sport Leader and was Deputy Chief judge for the 2017 and 2019 World Championships—what an honor! It was difficult for me to take the reins from Will, and I am grateful for his continued help and support.

The Congress's main office is growing as well. This year we hired Sabrina Bateman as an administration assistant/treasurer to help with the increased workload. Sabrina has been terrific! If you call the information number or send an inquiry to info@icelandics.org, you will hear from Sabrina. We also have an online store for USIHC merchandise, and organizational partnerships with Flying C Tack and Scoot Boots, who offer discounts to our members. Let us know if you want to partner with the USIHC or know of someone we should approach.

Whew! That is a lot, and I am sure I have missed some things. I am immensely proud of our organization and the camaraderie of the membership. My thanks to you all and please let us know if you have requests or suggestions or want to get more involved. Our annual meeting will be held over Zoom on February 22 at noon EST, with guest speaker Freija Thye. I hope to see you all there!

## ELECTION

The 2024 election will select three directors for the USIHC Board; each will serve for terms of three years, starting on January 1, 2025. Incumbent directors Leslie Chambers, Emily Potts, and Janet Mulder are up for re-election. Janet Mulder has opted to run for re-election. Leslie Chambers and Emily Potts have declined to run for re-election.

In accordance with the USIHC constitution, the president appointed a committee of three Congress members to administer the 2024 election: Deb Cook (chair), Ellen Parker, and Robyn Schmutz. The election committee accepted nominations until October 30. All candidates were requested to send short statements giving their backgrounds in relation to the Icelandic horse and reasons why they should be elected. The candidate's statements were disseminated with the ballots sent to all voting members by November 4. The election committee will accept voted ballots until December 15 and provide the tabulated results to the president no later than December 20. Any questions regarding the election process should be addressed to Deb Cook at election@icelandics.org.

The August Leisure Rider of the Month was Latifa ("Tif") Rodriguez of Colorado. Photo by Stefan Rodriguez.

### JUDGING CLINIC

At the Svöluhagi Klassik show in September, organized by Léttleiki Icelandics of Shelbyville, KY, FEIF International Sport Judge Alex Dannenmann gave a highly educational judging clinic that included theory, video judging, and judging of ridden horses, as well as a presentation by FEIF International Sport Judge Florian R. Schneider. Over the course of the show weekend, participants in the clinic were able to practice their judging skills and discuss performances with both international FEIF judges. Says participant Alex Pregitzer, "It was yet another weekend filled with fun and learning in Shelbyville. Thank you, Maggie Brandt and Léttleiki Icelandics!"

### SHOW SEASON

Nine National Ranking or World Ranking Shows were held in the US this fall. The Northwest Icelandic Horse Club Fall Show was held at Alfadans Equestrian Arts in Newberg, OR on September 7-8. The Svöluhagi Klassik was held at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY on September 14-15. The fourth and fifth shows in the Sólheimar Pentathlon were held at Sólheimar Farm in Tunbridge, VT, on September 28-29 and October 26-27. The Harmony Icelandics Triple World Ranking Shows (three individual shows) were held at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, IA on October 4-6. On October 26, Taktur Icelandics hosted the Fall Gamankeppni, a National Ranking Show, at Locust Hill in Prospect, KY. The US show season closed with the CIA Open Fall Show, held at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA on November 9-10. The National Ranking is based on scores from virtual and live National Ranking or World Ranking shows from the past two years. See the rankings at https://icelandics.org/national-rider-rank-listing. Check the USIHC Events calendar (https://icelandics.org/events/) for future show opportunities.

### VIRTUAL SHOW

Registration for the 2024 USIHC Virtual Fall Show closed on October 18, with videos due by October 25. This show features National Ranking classes, fun classes (no oval track required), five judges, and Division Championships. As in our previous virtual show, the USIHC used TöltSense Online for the video submissions and payments. When registering through USIHC, riders received a unique TöltSense code, which allowed them to create a free TöltSense account. For a detailed guide on registration, class descriptions, and how to create a TöltSense account and submit videos for future USIHC Virtual Shows, please visit: https://icelandics.org/virtualshow/

### AMERICAN YOUTH CUP

The dates and location have been set for the 2025 North American Youth Cup! The event will take place June 22-29 at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, IA. The application has been posted on the NAYC website at https://sites.google.com/view/na-youth-cup/apply? and will be due April 1. "Take a look and get your application started early. The application includes a riding video," notes Youth Leader Lucy Nold, "so please plan accordingly and film before winter, if weather inhibits you."

### RIDERS OF THE MONTH

Each month the USIHC Leisure Committee randomly chooses one of the 100-plus riders taking part in the Sea 2 Shining Sea Virtual Ride (S2SS) to be the Rider of the Month. This quarter's featured riders are Rob Gregory of London, KY; Latifia ("Tif") Rodriguez of Mancos, CO; and Amy Keeler of Block Island, RI.

Since being introduced to them at Equitana some years ago, Rob has amassed a herd of eight Icelandics. He was recruited to his S2SS team by his friends, Jamie and Shawn Jackson. In addition to the virtual rides, he has competed in a few National Ranking shows. Asked what he enjoys about trail riding, he says, "Peace, the beauty of nature, and the company of good friends and horses." His goal is "to spend every possible minute riding."

Tif owns two Icelandics, Brymir (15) and Ásta (6). Since going on a riding trip to Iceland, she writes, "I have become crazy about this breed! They are fun, smart, safe, sure-footed, brave, and so comfort-

able. I'm enjoying the fast pace and the beautiful gaits, especially the tölt." Tif has been an avid equestrian most of her life, and does a lot of volunteer work on public lands, helping to keep trails open for equestrians. "I've done all disciplines: gymkhana, dressage, western pleasure, rodeo, jumping, English, you name it. Trail riding is on a different level. We have the most beautiful country where I live, and getting into the backcountry is an experience that I try to have as often as possible. I see wildlife of all kinds—bear, elk, deer, you name it. Riding my horse up to a waterfall or along a creek and hearing nothing but the sounds of nature and our own hoof beats is incredible. It rejuvenates me for when Monday rolls around and work is calling."

Amy does not own any Icelandic horses herself, "but I am lucky enough to ride three on Block Island," she says. They are Odinn and Falki, ownd by Sue Gibbons, and Tryggur, owned by Susan Matheke. In addition to trail riding and tracking their miles for S2SS, the Block Island group work on cavaletti, small jumps, and liberty training. "The horses pull us on skis on the winter snow," Amy says. "Hopefully, soon we can teach them to drive." Amy also likes to ride in Iceland. "Having ridden out of Húsavík for the last five years, my goals are to continue that tradition, as well as riding with my friends on Block Island until I am no longer able to swing my leg over the saddle."

The September Leisure Rider of the Month was Amy Keeler of Rhode Island.

**BOARD MEETINGS**

The USIHC Board of Directors met by Zoom call on August 13 and September 10. 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 approved setting a membership fee for the National Team of $500, in addition to other expenses, for attending team clinics and events. The Breeding Committee reported that it is updating its pages on the USIHC website and working with Marlise Grimm on developing a "breeding expert" course. The Education Committee reported that development of the trainer certification module system was on track for the end of the year, and that the trainer database is being updated. The committee is also working on developing a clearer policy for keeping people on the certified trainer list. The Leisure Committee is working on developing new ideas for recognition and activities. The Board also approved increasing the print run of the Quarterly to 650 copies per quarter, to cover the increase in our membership. No extra copies will be printed for promotional uses, unless requested in advance by clubs or individuals.

### SOCIAL LICENSE

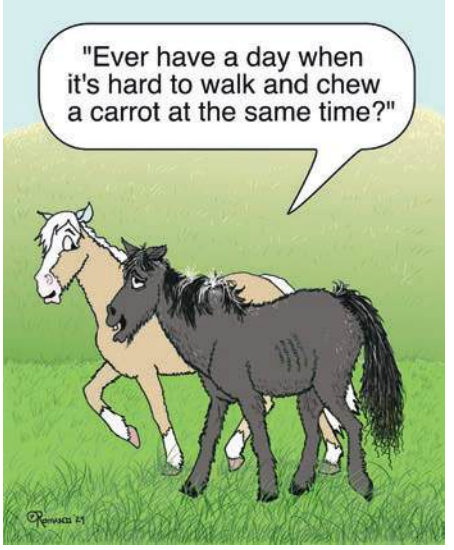
On September 24, representatives of 10 FEIF member countries participated in a vigorous and stimulating meeting about the social license to operate. Naturally, discussions about horse welfare, the public reception of equine activities, and the law have different weights across nations. It is interesting to see which topics overlap internationally and which are more tied to individual countries.

It clearly emerged that Icelandic horse associations have a lot to offer by way of clear rules and good practice, and in many countries close ties exist between our organizations and the national horse federations. Concerns about the weights of riders and horses, as well as discussions about more stringent control of competitions, are widely shared across nations.

The conversation touched upon inspiring examples of how to tackle questions about keeping horses, optimizing horse training, and encouraging best practices among non-professional riders and horse keepers. All present shared a passion to do the best for the Icelandic horse and to encourage others to do likewise. The next meeting on horse welfare issues and concerns about our social license to operate will be in mid-November.

### WARNINGS AND BANS

All persons and corporate bodies (e.g. riders, judges, organizers, other officials, and associations) involved with Icelandic horses are committed to fair, comradely, and sportsmanlike behavior to one another, and correct behavior toward the horse. All persons are bound to the Code of Ethics and the Code of Conduct regarding the Welfare of the Horse and Fair Play and Equestrian Sport, as described in the FEIF General Rules and Regulations. FEIF is maintaining a register of warnings (general, sport) and public reprimands (breeding) given to persons for breaching these rules in the various member countries. FEIF also maintains a list of persons banned (suspended) for a specific period from participation in any event or show in any country. See more at https://www.feif.org/feif/warnings-bans/




### EQUITATION SCIENCE

FEIF is a member of ISES, the International Society for Equitation Science. ISES is a not-for-profit organization that chiefly aims to facilitate research into the training of horses to enhance horse welfare and improve the horse–rider relationship. The Mission of ISES is to promote and encourage the application of objective research and advanced practice, which will ultimately improve the welfare of horses in their associations with humans. Find out more at https://www.equitationscience.com/

### RESEARCH ON RECOVERY

Preliminary research on the recovery phase of Icelandic horses after a 250m pace race was conducted in Brunnadern, Switzerland in October 2023. The work was continued in Iceland this year during the last week of August, when the research team examined the recovery times of some of the fastest horses in this discipline.

The research team consists of scientists from Hólar University in Iceland and the University of Zurich in Switzerland and is led by Guðrún Jóhanna Stefánsdóttir and Michael Weishaupt. The aim of this study is to understand in detail the recovery of heart rate and blood lactate concentration after a 250m pace race. Based on the results of how high the heart rate and lactate values rise, and how long it takes for the lactate concentration to return to the normal reference range, the minimum pause duration between the two pace runs in the test will be re-evaluated by FEIF.

The weather was perfect at the venues at Hólar University and at the pace tracks in Hella and Viðidalur, outside of Reykjavík. Icelandic sport team leader Sigurbjörn Bárðarson provided invaluable assistance recruiting riders to participate in the research project. The researchers are also grateful for the support of veterinarians Gestur Júlíusson and Þóra Höskuldsdóttir, both from Dýraspítali Lögmannshlíð in Akureyri, as well as of the riders and assistants who participated in the study.

### NEW WORLD RECORD P3

Congratulations to Konráð Valur Sveinsson [IS] and Kjarkur frá Árbæjarhjáleigu II [IS2006186758] on setting a new world record in P3 (150m Pace Race) with a time of 13.46 seconds at the World Ranking event Íslandsmót fullorðinna og Ungmenna 2024, held in Reykjavík, Iceland on July 27, 2024. All world records are available on the FEIF website, including those set under the old system of manual time-keeping. See more at https://www.feif.org/worldrecords/

### YOUTH CUP

The 2024 FEIF Youth Cup was an exciting week! This year's event was hosted by Switzerland on the tracks in Münsingen. On July 13, 60 young riders aged 14-17 from 10 different FEIF countries came together for a week of fun, of speaking English, and of training with international trainers: Svenja

Braun (DE), Herdís Reynisdóttir (IE), Johannes Armplatz (IS), Jens Fürchtenschnieder (DE), and Christoph Weiss (CH). The program included a visit to a national stud farm and culminated in a two-day team competition.

The FEIF Youth Cup is about more than rosettes and trophies: People who had been strangers only five days before became friends and started to look out for one another. Everyone learned something important about themselves, natural leaders emerged, interpersonal difficulties had to be navigated, and everyone admired those who kept calm in the storm. Looking back, this Youth Cup will be remembered as one of the best, with great leadership from the organizing team, fantastic facilities, and—most of all—a new beginning after six years, proving that there is life after Covid and we are living it.

The 2026 FEIF Youth Cup will take place in Germany. Results from the 2024 competition can be found on IceTest NG. You can also read in detail how the days went at https://www.feif.org/category/youth-work/ and in the article by US team member Miette Jennings in this issue of the Quarterly.

### OFFSPRING AWARDS

Each year, outstanding Icelandic breeding horses, distinguished by the global success of their offspring, are honored by the national FEIF member association in the horses' residing country. The award is based on information provided by WorldFengur, the Studbook of Origin for the Icelandic horse, which is operated by RML in Iceland.

Very few breeding horses meet the minimum requirements for these awards, which are based on the BLUP value for the total score, calculated either with or without consideration of pace. The number of assessed offspring of the specific horse plays a major role. When determining the rankings within awarding groups, the average total score of the offspring is used. Only living horses are eligible for these prestigious awards.

The first honour prize for offspring was awarded in 1947 to Skuggi frá Bjarnanesi. Since then, numerous breeding horses have received this honor, which has had a great influence on the breeding development of the Icelandic horse, as such awards contribute significantly to the spread of the award-winning horses.

The joint database of WorldFengur and the international BLUP breeding values enable breeding horses in all FEIF member countries to qualify for offspring awards, as the same criteria are applied in all countries, regardless of the horses' geographic location. The list of horses that have received honor prizes for offspring since 2018 can be found at https://www.feif.org/breeding-dept/offspring-awards/

### WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

In July, the training track for the 2025 World Championships at Hardwinkelhof in Birmenstorf, Switzerland were completed. The track offers optimal conditions for the participants to prepare for the various tests and presentations. On August 20, the groundbreaking ceremony for the official oval track and the pace track, which will also be used for breeding presentations, took place. For Roman Spieler, head of the organizing committee, the official start of construction is an important milestone: "With the groundbreaking ceremony for the competition tracks, everything is now becoming a reality. We have been planning the 2025 World Championships since 2019, so the start of the construction is a very significant day."

Early bird discounts for tickets to the 2025 World Championships are available until the end of 2024 at https://www.ticket-corner.ch/artist/world-championship-islandic-horses/?affiliate=IWM

### VIRTUAL RIDES

With the beginning of Landsmót, the Icelandic National Horse Show, the FEIF Virtual Ride called "To Fákur and Fast" came to an end. In August 2023, about 80 riders from all over the world started to add up all the kilometers they spent in the saddle in an attempt to—virtually—reach Iceland, either as an individual or in a team, in time for the competition. Together they achieved almost 30,000 km. The top individual distance of 2,482 km was accomplished by a rider from Germany, who exceeded her own target by 140 km—an astonishing feat. Congratulations to all participants, riders and horses alike.

The 13th FEIF Virtual Ride, "Bring on Birmenstorf"—from your home to the next World Championships in Birmenstorf, Switzerland—is now on the road. There is plenty of space for more riders! Registration and participation is free. See more at https://www.feif.org/2024/07/26/bring-on-birmenstorf-feif-virtual-ride-2025/

A Virtual Ride is just that: real riding on your horse along a virtual route from your home to the flagship events of the Icelandic horse calendar, the World Championships and Landsmót. These events are held in alternating years in Europe and in Iceland, respectively. Over the course of a year, the Virtual Ride invites Icelandic horse riders to make their way gradually (and virtually) to these venues.

This is not a competition. The aim is to bring people together, both in real life and virtually (mostly on Facebook). Participants may ride solo or in teams. Every rider progresses in accordance with their own routine and fitness, keeping track of the approximate distance covered each time they ride out. Each month, they tally up those distances and log them on the FEIF website. Riders and teams can track their own progress—and that of everyone else—on the scoreboard. Every year, a new ride offers a way of getting to know each other, the different landscapes and seasons we ride through, and all the adventures encountered on the way. Why not join in?

# 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.*

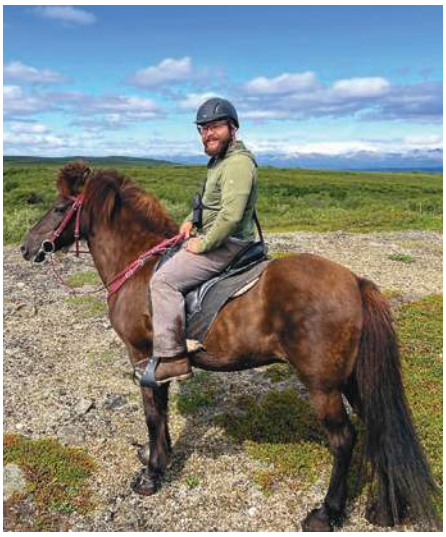
## ALASKA

*by Ellen Halverson & Alana Wright*

*Ellen writes:* This summer in Alaska we have had lots of clouds and rain—by mid-September, 2024 was the third wettest year to date. However, a little rain never slowed down our stalwart Icelandic horses. We had a total of four Alaska Icelandic Horse Association clinics this summer: two in June with trainers Freya Sturm and Janet Mulder, one in July with Caeli Cavanagh, and a second clinic with Freya in September. Janet also ran a kids' camp in July. Alas, our schooling show was canceled, as Covid is still lurking and our judge-to-be was ill. Folks have continued to be active with their horses, and we hope to have some good fall riding.

Two AIHA members, Alana Wright and Jay Murray, started their journey with Icelandic horses in 2023. They are doing so much, and having so much fun, that I asked them to share their journey with you all.

*Alana writes:* The pungent, sweet, familiar smell of horse manure hit me as I stepped out of the rental car and onto the Laxnes Icelandic horse farm near Reykjavik, Iceland. A line-up of sturdy, fuzzy horses were dozing in the unexpectedly sunny April afternoon, and the dormant horse girl in me quickly bubbled to the surface with pure giddiness.



AIHA member Jay Murray and Kolfinna on an adventure.

Alaska Icelandic Horse Association members Alana Wright (shown here on Rubin) and Jay Murray (below) enjoy taking their horses on adventures, including a 500-mile camping trip through the Denali highway. "The Icelandics have enriched our lives tremendously," Alana writes.

Our trip to celebrate my stepdad's 70th birthday in Ireland included a four-day stopover in Iceland, where we were determined to do as much as possible. I had a bit of a hidden agenda and booked a riding tour for the four of us as a gift to my stepdad, but in reality, it was entirely for myself. After reading *Riding the Wild Side of Denali* by Miki and Julie Collins, and having recently moved onto a property that could house horses, I began scheming. I was wildly smitten with the Icelandic horse. Having a trip already planned to Iceland was my perfect opportunity to meet these hardy horses. Our riding tour was a brief two-hour ride, on which my stout, black gelding smoothly tölted the entire time, with zero direction or help from me. I was hooked. When I turned around to my partner, Jay, halfway through the ride, with a grin plastered to my face, he quickly understood: He would be building a fence when we got home.

Well before we touched back down on US soil, I had purchased and arranged transport to Alaska for our first Icelandic horses. Fast forward a few months later, and Freyja from Oregon and Rubin from Canada arrived at our house. Despite all the planning and work, I could still hardly believe it: We actually have horses! The moment of unloading them was completely surreal and a bit panic-inducing. My partner and I both grew up with horses, but as adults we had never had any of our very own. The initial learning curve of owning horses and keeping them at our home proved to be a steep one. I am so grateful that the Icelandic community in Alaska is not only robust, but also very generous and welcoming. Janet Mulder deserves an award for indulging me in long conversations regarding appropriate horse supplementation and answering questions about tack, as well as providing the lessons and clinics that have been invaluable to our horsemanship journey.

Once the initial terror of keeping these two new beings alive and healthy wore off, we began to hit our stride. Rides continued as much as we could all tolerate during the cold winter months and once summer hit, we were ready for bigger adventures. This also came with the realization that our mare Freyja would likely enjoy a more relaxed lifestyle. At 21, she was still very spry, but it was clear that she was not thrilled about rides longer than a few miles. Fortunately, we found a perfect home for her to spend her golden years in Talkeetna with two young Icelandics and two doting (human) tweens to adore her. We knew we couldn't keep Rubin solo, and a perfect opportunity to purchase one of Janet Mulder's horses was presented. Kolfinna frá Selfossi turned out to be an excellent match for us and our riding goals and joined Rubin on our small farm in June.

Since then, we have wasted no time enjoying countless summer adventures. A few

of these adventures have included a competitive trail ride, a 500-mile camping trip through the Denali highway, lessons with Freya Sturm, participating in Janet Mulder's clinic, riding horses to our remote cabin for long weekends, and enjoying mornings on our porch that we affectionately call Coffee and Carrots Time.

The Icelandics have enriched our lives tremendously. I find as much joy in caring for and tending to the horses as I do training and riding them. The repetition and structure of getting outside each day for morning and nighttime chores has helped me ward off the sadness that can sometimes accompany Alaska's long dark winter days. I am also certain that tölting along a snowy trail is another guaranteed way to keep the melancholy at bay. There is something exceptionally special about these horses, and each day I feel so grateful and lucky to get to share my life with them. We look forward to many more years of enjoying their companionship and growing in our horsemanship journey.

## CASCADE

*by Lisa Roland*

This summer brought us a handful of activities, with our annual beach ride in July being the biggest activity of our club here in the Pacific Northwest. Much fun was had by everyone riding along the beach in Washington state, where we had the good luck of photographer Steven Storm visiting us and spending an afternoon taking pictures of our mixed group of breeds.

Cascade Club member Lori Birge participated in a World Ranking show on September 7-8 at Alfadans Equestrian Arts in Newberg, OR. The show was judged by Will Covert and sponsored by the Northwest Icelandic Horse Club. Both NWIHC and Cascade Club members attended. There was a good turnout, including a number of youth riders. After each preliminary class, Will gave comments to each rider to help them improve their scores in the finals. Lori and her horse Snillingur did very well, securing two first, two third, and one fifth place.

Above, Cascade Club members (left to right) Lisa Roland, Dani Rae, Lori Birge, Riley Erickson, Diana Harris, Andrew Nickelson, Chantel Delaney, and Monica Urrutia-Sheehan, with their Icelandics and non-Icelandics, on a beach ride in the Pacific Northwest. Photo by Steven Storm. Below, Lori Birge and Snillingur at the World Ranking Show held by Alfadans Equestrian Arts in Oregon. Photo by Jennifer Quinn.

## HESTAFOLK

*by Lisa McKeen*

Luckily for our club, most of us here in northwest Washington and British Columbia were safe from fires this summer, though we did have a couple of Hestafolk Club members who had to evacuate their horses. We are all thankful for the connections we have in the Icelandic horse world. We are also glad that the rain has returned to help put those fires out, along with the courageous fire-fighting forces we have.

Other than the fires, what a glorious summer it has been. We started off with our members attending camp at Vinur Farm in Trout Lake, WA. We had so much fun together. We created new trail bling and stall

Enjoying the beach in Grayland, WA are Hestafolk members Mary Chamberlin on Ljufa from Fitjamyri, Lisa McKeen on Salina from Evans Farm, and Lauren Murphy on Andi from Evans Farm. Photo by RJ Argenzio.

When the Tahoma Chapter of Backcountry Horsemen of Washington held their annual prize ride in September, the 6.5 mile trail was flagged by Hestafolk member Pamela Hill on her Icelandic, Wendy Brown on her Missouri Fox Trotter, and Mary Quinn on her Tennessee Walker. "The varying heights of the three horses made flagging the trail a breeze." Photo by Adrian Medved.

signs, and I finally learned how to make pine needle baskets. The beer tölt was too much fun. Mary has a sticky seat, and Sali will not tölt if I spill water on her. Can't wait till next summer.

We have some new members who are crazy about trails, so we are trying to get together and enjoy the weather before the great gray comes back. RJ Argencio and Lauren Murphy introduced us to the trails at JBLM Area 10, with Heidi Benson joining us. Becky Pelletier introduced us to the Redmond Pipeline trails, which are gorgeous and challenging enough for new horses and riders. Mary Chamberlin and I found a new trail at Squires Lake in Whatcom County and are looking for a beach ride in the area. With all the salt water and the long Salish Sea shoreline, surely there's something up here.

Our members have ridden at Equine Trail Sport competitions, and we took Icelandics to the state fair in Puyallup and to the Vikingfest in Arlington. Through our Facebook page, we helped find new owners for a couple of Icelandics needing homes.

Club member Pam Hill helped the Tacoma Chapter of Backcountry Horsemen hold their annual prize ride on September 7 at Danville Georgetown Open Space, a great trail space in Maple Valley, WA. Gaited horses were amply represented.

We value the connections we are making with our three Sea 2 Shining Sea teams. Our Central team is kicking butt! The rest of us are riding, and there's no complaining about that.

Becky Pelletier put together a map of where our members live and, though we are strung out, we are doing better at gathering together. We are preparing a member survey for the fall meeting, so that we can create the experiences our members want. Goals for our next Zoom meetings with trainer Freya Sturm are developing, along with ideas for other activities next year. Movie night anyone?

## KLETTAFJALLA

*by Ellen Lichtenstein*

The summer is always a busy time for the Klettafjalla Icelandic Horse Club (KIHC), as we take advantage of one of the nicest seasons for riding activities in our Rocky Mountain region. This year, July and August were full of camping trips organized by KIHC President Ellen Lichtenstein, including one to one of our favorite destinations: Winding River Resort in Grand Lake, CO. This year's trip had five Icelandic horses and some of our Paso Fino "cousins" as well. Despite encountering moose and getting caught in a torrential downpour in the mid-

Sylgja frá Ketilsstöðum ridden by Klettafjalla member Olivia Rasmussen at the Tamangur Icelandic Fall Event. Photo by Matt Clark.

Klettafjalla members enjoying the trails during their camping trip at Winding River Resort in Colorado.

Klettafjalla member Rachel Clark getting feedback from judge Nicolai Thye at the Tamangur Icelandic Fall Event. Photo by Matt Clark.

dle of Rocky Mountain National Park, we all lived to ride another day. In September, we visited KIHC member Cindy Loader's Spirit Dancer Ranch for a fantastic day of obstacles, games, and trail riding.

One of our region's largest events of the year took place from September 18-21. The Tamangur Icelandic Fall Event (TIFE) included three days of clinics and two days of competition, and attracted 40 horse-rider pairs from around our region and beyond. We were honored to have fantastic clinicians this year in Freija Thye and Guðmar Pétursson, along with our judge Nicolai Thye, who provided detailed feedback to each competitor on their performance.

During this event, KIHC presented our annual Crystle Feldner Memorial Award. In honor of the late Crystal Feldner, who always blessed our events with her laughter, this award goes to a member of our community who inspires joy. This year's recipient was Coralie Denmeade, who represented the spirit of the award's namesake so well, despite nearly endless obstacles and hardships over the past year.

**NEIHC**

*by Jennifer Bergantino*

As summer gives way to autumn here in the Northeast corner of the US, the NEIHC community has been vibrant with activity, transformation, and adventure. The warm, sleek summer coats of our Icelandic horses are transitioning to their coarser, cozy winter fur, and as warm temperatures linger, many members have been thinking about investing in clippers.

The heat and pesky bugs of summer motivated many riders to seek cooler climates. NEIHC member Kate Kalan embarked on an extraordinary journey to Botswana, riding alongside majestic elephants and giraffes (though not on Icelandic horses). Amy Keeler and Susan Matheke enjoyed double tours with Riding-Iceland in early August. Edie Freeman, a relatively new NEIHC member, embarked on her first trek. Edie is now hooked and has already signed up for another trek in 2025. She shared, "The trek was both challenging and great fun. We rode through rivers and varied landscapes in extremely windy weather. Great horse and excellent guides. Loved it so much that I'm doing another trek next year!"

Jennifer Bergantino, Charity Simard, Anna Walstrom, and Brenda Nishamara, with her daughter Jackie, also journeyed to Iceland for a trek with Women's Quest. Their adventure included not only phenomenal riding—such as swimming horses across a deep tidal stream—but also hiking, sightseeing to waterfalls, bathing in mountain hot springs and local spas, and yoga. While on a hike in the middle of Iceland, the NEIHC group literally ran into a fellow USIHC member, Katherine Forrest of the St. Skutla Club. It was a trip of surprises and magic. Jennifer reflects, "The morning of our first trek day, we awoke and did Chi Gong in the field with our herd of over 70 horses. As we lowered our energy and moved to the ground, all of the horses, except one on guard, lay down with our group of humans. This was not trained or a trick, it was just truly magical!"

NEIHC member Sabrina Bateman's Kjarkur used to be "uncatchable, untrusting, and challenging." Now he's a member of the family.

NEIHC member Carlin Tompson and Blæja were ambassadors for the Icelandic horse at a local show in Maine.

Ebba and Brynja Meehan from Merrimack Valley Icelandics (MVI) in Boxford, MA began their Icelandic adventure with a trip to Reykjavík to watch Landsmót. They then met NEIHC youth members Miette Jennings and Liesl Kolbe, and MVI rider Greeley O'Connor, in Switzerland for the FEIF Youth Cup (FYC). Greeley was the US Country Leader for the FYC, while Brynja, Miette, and Liesl, along with Greta Alsauskas of Kentucky, proudly represented the US, training and competing with leased horses from Hof Niederfeld. Many in the NEIHC community generously contributed to support these talented young riders. Brynja, whose FYC photo graces the cover of this issue, reports, "It was an incredible learning experience for all to watch Bea Rusterholtz teach the team, and a privilege to receive a lesson as well!"

Later in the summer, Ebba and Bynja were joined by several MVI riders on two treks in Iceland, both organized by Hes-

Dylan Casey and Hástígur represented the Icelandic horse at the Cobleskill Sunshine Fair in New York.

taland, sharing the adventure with Swiss riders. The group enjoyed fantastic riding and got to see the Northern Lights. Linda Ferraro also saw the Northern Lights, when she participated in this year's Icelandic sheep roundup through Nups Hestar. She reports, "The experience was incredible! Exhilarating and so much fun to ride. To top it off we had two nights of Northern Lights to marvel at."

Closer to home, Block Island riders Sue Gibbons, Amy Keeler and Susan Matheke are looking forward to the cool, quieter fall months and the freedom of beach gallops. Sue Gibbons offers NEIHC members to please look her up if you get to Block Island.

Sabrina Bateman from Monkton, VT, shared a heartwarming story about Kjarkur, who came to her as a challenging, untrusting 21-year-old and has become a reliable mount for her visiting family. "It's been a long road, but watching him evolve from an uncatchable horse to a trusted partner has been one of the most rewarding horse experiences I have had over the years," she shares.

NEIHC members enjoyed learning and clinics of varied types. Sue Gibbons enjoyed Cathrine Fodstad's "Ride like a Viking" course, focusing on building connection with her horse. NEIHC members Charity Simard and Phebe Kiryk of Cedar Tree Stables in Ipswich, MA also participated in innovative clinics. Charity went to a Horse Speak clinic, developed by trainer Sharon Wilsie of Alstead, NH. Charity reports, "The concept is basically a practical system and language for listening and communicating with horses. It approaches interactions with full consideration of the horse's language and way of being. It really has to be experienced!" Phebe spent a week at Taktur Icelandics with Carrie Lyons-Brandt and Terral Hill, immersed in Liberty training. Phebe shares, "There is much to gain from integrating this gentle and nuanced communication method into anyone's training."

At Ebba Meehan's MVI, the lesson program kept going as much as the weather allowed. The MVI Drill Team of Kate Kalan, Valerie Moore, Scott Smith, Shelby Walker, Lexi Mitchell, Brynja Meehan, and coach Erika Tighe met regularly to prepare for performing at the Topsfield Fair in early October. Fall at MVI brings trail rides, training, and showing preparation. Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY welcomed MVI members Scott Smith, Shelby Walker, Brynja and Ebba Meehan, and Greeley O'Connor to ride and record on their oval track. Ebba reflects, "We are grateful for the opportunity to visit and enjoy the grounds at Thor."

NEIHC member Kate Kalan riding with friends in Iceland, on a trek organized by Merrimack Valley Icelandics and Hestaland.

On the competitive front, Dylan Casey and Hástígur from Blue Farm made their show debut at the Cobleskill Sunshine Fair in Cobleskill, NY. They rode in the Riders Age 13+ division, Pleasure and Equitation Classes. "Stig" was the lone Icelandic horse, competing against Quarter horses, Morgans, Arabs, and other "big horse" breeds.

In Maine, youth member Carlin Tompson and Blæja participated in a local show series this summer—a first for both of them, although you'd never have known it. Blæja was a wonderful ambassador for the breed, sweeping the gaited class as, not only the only Icelandic, but also the only gaited horse in attendance the whole season. They also competed successfully in the Youth Walk/Trot Pleasure and Equitation classes.

Katrin of Mill Farm (age 22) entered the Annual Myopia Horse Show with senior rider and matriarch of the North Shore of Massachusetts equestrian community, Susanna Colloredo-Mansfeld. The pair competed in the Century Class, where the combined age of horse and rider must exceed 100 years! Susanna enthused, "I had a wonderful time. I could not be happier with this terrific horse!"

We love competing in traditional Icelandic events, too! At Sólheimar Farm in Tunbridge, VT, Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir hosted the Sólheimar Pentathlon, featuring five National Ranking shows, each judged by a different FEIF International Sport Judge. The series kicked off in June and continued with shows in July, August, and September, culminating in October with the final show.

In the August show's tölt class, Sigrún's daughter, Kamilla Brickner, scored an impressive 6.5, taking first place, while Finja Meyer-Holt closely followed in second, with a score of 6.3. Both riders demonstrated exceptional skill. Sigrún remarked, "It was

one of the best I have seen. They rode like warriors!"

Despite the summer heat, Sigrún achieved record turnouts for all four shows thus far. The September show was particularly successful, with many riders coming with specific goals. Sigrún remarked, "It was a huge success, because so many riders had goals and they attained those goals." Among the achieved goals, Kamilla also did exceptionally well in V6 Four Gait and is now just 0.3 points away from first place nationwide—an exciting accomplishment. Sigrún and her "rescue horse," Markus, scored an impressive 7.2 in T1 Tölt, with 7.5 for speed changes. Ebba Meehan and her daughter Brynja both received scores of 6.1 in V2 Four Gait, with Brynja qualifying for the national team. Ebba is close behind, and needs just one more score above 6 to join her. Sigrún achieved her own goals too, making it a truly rewarding event for everyone involved. We can't wait for the final event and the Pentathlon championships!

## NORTHWEST

*by Alexandra Venable*

The Northwest Icelandic Horse Club (NWIHC), which serves the eastern slope of the Cascade Mountain Range in Washington state, had a very busy quarter, filled with lots of trail rides, clinics, and our annual fall show.

We had our first Level 1 Knapamerki clinic for the kids in our club at Alfadans Equestrian Arts. The first day was a clinic with Caeli Cavanagh, reviewing everything on the tests, from learning the parts of the horse, to horse care, to groundwork, to perfecting the rider's seat. The second day was testing day. The tests included both a groundwork test and a seat test, as well as a theory exam covering the parts of the horse, equine vision, the gaits of the Icelandic horse, and more. Our judge was Pia Rumpf, a FEIF Level 3 trainer from Iceland who was able to judge virtually. All of the participants passed! A big congrats to Grace Dillingham, Brooklyn Knowlden, Evelyn Kaufman, Zo-Massy Zinke-Haschemeyer, and Emelia Stewart!

Zo-Massy Zinke-Haschemeyer and Jennifer Quinn at the NWIHC Annual show at Álfadans Equestrian Arts

We also had our NWIHC Annual show at Alfadans Equestrian Arts, with 22 horse-rider combinations. There were strong performances from many of our riders, including several scores that qualified for USIHC Lifetime Achievement Awards. There was a wide range of experience levels and ages represented at the show, from youth and novice all the way up to professional categories. Our fun classes, such as Team Four Gait and the obstacle courses, were also a big hit. This show wouldn't be possible without the amazing help of our Icelandic horse community.

## SIRIUS

*by Janet Kuykendall*

The members of the Sirius Ohio Kentucky Icelandic Horse Club have been busier than ever. Congratulations to Nancy Radebaugh and Gunnar, who won first place in the Knox County (Ohio) obstacle course challenge. Kudos also to Laura Glaza, who attended the Judging Education Event at the Svöluhagi Klassik National Ranked show held at Léttleiki Icelandics.

Sirius Club member Shellie Grayhavens at a Liberty Clinic with Carrie Lyons-Brandt in Ohio.

The Archers of Arvak Icelandic horse archery team raided the Kentucky Highland Renaissance Fair during Viking weekend. Leader Chris Marks opened the show carrying the club flag, staking a claim to our newly conquered territory, after our ground archers defeated the Ulfehðinn Vikings in a battle of foam-tipped arrows and smack talk! Our archers, including Will Wells, Daniel Zaayer, and Lindsay Hillyer, proceeded to demonstrate an array of archery battle shots, including the very difficult Jarmaki shot, which is done behind the head. Will Wells did his amazing solo act as an aerial shooter as well.

Then in came the mighty Icelandic

Colleen McCafferty rides the beer-in-hand obstacle course at the Sirius Club retreat.

Sirius member Shari Wells performing at the Fenrir Viking Festival.

horses! The crowd was in awe to see a display of mounted archery from various gaits. A couple of the horses, including Andvari from Tölthaven, ridden by Shari Wells, are still learning to deal with such a large and rowdy crowd, so we enlisted the audience to help with desensitizing them to the noise! The audience enjoyed being a part of the training. Meanwhile, the more seasoned horses, including Sólon frá Sörlatungu, with rider Carly Conley-Zaayer, entertained the crowd with archery duels, cantering, and shooting as if it were a real battle! As Carly came blazing down the lane, the crowd roared her Viking name: Lagertha, Lagertha, Lagertha! Where else can you have this much fun? The Archers of Arvak will be performing again at the Fenrir Viking Festival—back by popular demand!

On a related note, Shari writes, "I was fortunate enough to have a private mounted archery lesson with Elizabeth Tinnan, the leading mounted archer in the US. We started the session shooting on the ground, and she showed me ways to improve. Once I got the hang of these adjustments, I got on a horse—but not just any horse. I got on her personal competition horse, Banjo! He was a monster, compared to my little Icelandic. Not only that, he wears goggles, and he smiles and dances for cookies. But he was very patient with me, as I tried to learn to shoot from an archer's stance, which is similar to a two-point seat, except that the rider is standing a bit taller. With a little fine-tuning, I made some progress. Elizabeth shared with me some new techniques that were unheard of in the US when she did mounted archery with Chris Marks, who is the co-founder of the Archers of Arvak. Elizabeth's techniques have changed and developed over the years, as she has traveled the globe seeking to improve her skills. For anyone looking to expand their archery skills, Elizabeth Tinnan is an excellent teacher." She is located in Tennessee and is available for private lessons and clinics.

The club sponsored a two-day Liberty Clinic with Carrie Lyons-Brandt—although the clinic should really be called Liberty and More, as on the second day Carrie asked what else everyone wanted to learn. Member Cindy Gray-Stanley hosted the clinic at her beautiful farm in Mt. Vernon, OH. Club members offered these comments on the clinic: Shellie Greyhavens was amazed to see the progress in both her horse and herself in such a short period of time. Emotional regulation is something she liked talking about. She exclaimed, "I have new goals!" Ron Hoover was excited to learn how to begin the process of training a horse to be ridden bridleless. Lisa Desjardins said, "I enjoyed watching the connection and confidence increase with each horse and rider. Carrie's instructions were awesome!"

Ron Hoover working through the poles obstacle at the Sirius Club retreat.

Jane Coleman is all geared up for rain at the Sirius Club's obstacle course.

Nancy Radebaugh said, "Going into the clinic, I thought it would be fun to teach Gunnar the Spanish walk. However, after I told Carrie that I have always had a problem getting Gunnar to canter in an arena or on flat ground, she offered to help me with that instead. I loved that she was so flexible and offered to help me work on something that would help me in my everyday riding. The other thing I loved about the clinic was that it was a total 'no judgment zone.' Actually, that's something I love about the Sirius Club altogether. Everyone is supportive and encouraging, no matter where you are on your journey with your horse."

Sirius members enjoyed their first club retreat, hosted at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY. The weekend full of fun-filled activities, worked up by Maggie Brandt and Laura Glaza, was attended by 16 club members. It began with a presentation on WOW saddles by Christine Marks.

Sherry Hoover loved the Saturday obstacles, especially the team beer obstacle competition. Team members had to complete an obstacle of their choice, then meet up with the next rider to pour the beer in their cup into the cup of the next contestant. The team with the most beer left at the end was the winner. Cindy Gray-Stanley loved riding the harmony figures to music; she felt it was exhilarating and free. Ron Hoover also enjoyed the harmony figures. Everyone completed the same pattern, but riders chose their own music, while Paetra Hennigar-Jakubowski and Carly Conley-Zaayer coached them. As always, the Léttleiki staff was wonderful! Saturday night was an outstanding potluck, followed by a brief meeting, at which Colleen McCafferty offered to interview members for a "get to know your fellow members" feature on our members-only Facebook site. Members also suggested that board meetings be open to all members. The retreat ended with a trail ride around the acres and acres of Swallowland Farm. Everyone enjoyed the camaradery and seeing the 2024 young foals.

Kitty Hall-Thurnheer and Jupiter from Cornell at the Hector Half Hundred Intro ride. Photo by Kelsey Eliot.

## ST. SKUTLA

*by Katherine Forrest*

Kitty Hall-Thurnheer has continued to build her relationship with her Cornell-bred horses Jupiter and Cody, riding in a Fourth of July parade, entering a barrel race at the Owego County Fair, and completing the 16-mile Intro Ride at the Hector Half Hundred endurance race. Kitty and John will be heading back to Pure Country Campground for another weekend workshop with Gary Lane, this time to begin tölt training with their mare, Freyja.

The Hector Half Hundred had three Icelandics on the roster, which is impressive for a distance riding event. Gaukur frá Sveinsstöðum placed sixth out of 30 horses in the 30-mile race, with Katherine Forrest aboard. Two weeks later, Gaukur and Katherine placed seventh out of 18 horses at the 25-mile Chautauqua Challenge, finishing out Gaukur's distance season with Top 10 finishes in every ride he entered.

July brought numerous USIHC members together in Iceland, with Charlotte Reilly, Lori Cretney, Carrie Brandt, Terral Hill, Caeli Cavanaugh, Katherine Forrest, Jia Forrest, and others gathering on the hill above Landsmót, the National Horse Show, in Reykjavík. Several folks dispersed from there to go on multi-day rides and, in an amazing coincidence, St. Skutla and NEIHC members ran into each other on the trail above Skógafoss in southern Iceland about a week later!

NEIHC and St. Skutla members Anna Wallstrom, Katherine Forrest, Charity Simard, and Jennifer Bergantino met by accident on the trail above Skógafoss in Southern Iceland.

A club survey is underway to learn more about our members' priorities and demographics, and to assist in charting a path forward. The survey is still open, but preliminary data indicate that the primary activity we enjoy with our horses is recreational trail riding (83.3% of respondents) and that the educational topics of most interest are "Icelandic horses under saddle, i.e. gait training and Icelandic-specific instruction," followed by "Health & Veterinary Topics," "Horse Husbandry & Welfare," and "Horse Behavior." Of note is that only 30.8% of the respondents are also NEIHC members and 53.8% are also USIHC members, which represents a significant opportunity for our club to encourage more involvement in these larger regional and national Icelandic horse organizations. Our members provided valuable feedback and also expressed their gratitude for the many years of connection within the Icelandic horse community that the St. Skutla Club has provided for riders in our central and western New York area.

# AT THE FEIF YOUTH CUP

by Miette Jennings

The FEIF Youth Cup is a bi-annual event for riders aged 14-17. It focuses on teamwork, sportsmanship, improving riding skills, and fostering cross-cultural friendships. The weeklong event features intense training with renowned international instructors and culminates in a competition with various youth classes. Team USA for the 2024 FEIF Youth Cup were Greta Alsauskas (KY), Liesl Kolbe (VT), Brynja Meehan (MA), and me, Miette Jennings (VT).

At 5 a.m. each day, the fluorescent lights flicked on in our underground bunker in Münsingen, Switzerland, awakening the participants, country leaders, and team leaders of the 2024 FEIF Youth Cup. The US team, along with the Swedish and French team, grumbled awake in our shared room. I said good morning to my friend and bunkmate, Greta, wondering, What will today bring?

After getting ready, we climbed up the stairs to the fresh, cool air above to wait for the shuttle that would bring us to Sólfaxi, the farm hosting this year's Youth Cup. Sólfaxi is a beautiful farm with a huge training barn, multiple arenas, an oval track, a pace track, and many horses.

The stable tents were in the middle of a field, with the Alps stretching out in the distance, offering a picturesque view. Our horses—Ernir frá Tröð (ridden by Greta), Goti fra Baunehøj (Liesl), Dís frá Hólakoti (Brynja), and my horse, Framtíð frá Flagbjarnarholti—had been leased to us by the amazing team at Hof Niederfeld. Their stalls were located at the end of the second stable, past the 15 Swiss stalls. Though it was a long walk, we ended up being quite lucky, as our stalls were on higher ground than other teams'. When the rains came overnight early on in the week, many horses had to be evacuated due to the rivers of muddy water running under the tent walls and pooling in their stalls. While the flooding was less than ideal, it truly brought everyone together—and quickly!—as we all worked together to tend to the horses, haul buckets of water out, dig trenches to divert, and carry tack out to safer ground. By the end of it, we were all covered in mud, but had made many new friends in the process.

Framtíð frá Flagbjarnarholti, ridden by Miette Jennings. Photo by Lumikki Equine Photo.

Team USA at the International FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland, posing in front of the Alps. Left to right: Miette Jennings (VT), Brynja Meehan (MA), Liesl Kolbe (VT), and Greta Alsauskas (KY). Brynja is also shown on the cover of this issue. Photo by country leader Greeley O'Connor.

## TRAINING

The week kicked off with three days of training, where we got the chance to work with each of the five different instructors: Svenja Braun for trail, Christopher Weiss for gaits, Johannes Amplatz for tölt, Jens Füchtenschnieder for pace and flag race, and Dísa Reynisdóttir for dressage. On the first day, we were sorted into our nine international teams; we spent the bulk of our time with our team, eating, training, and team building. My team, Eldur og Eldingar ("Fire & Lightning," with the feminine/masculine distinctions as a nod to our team leader, Dario), included two German riders, two Swiss riders, an Icelandic rider, a Dutch rider, and me. I loved my team: We were so supportive of one another and cheered each other on all week.

My favorite discipline was dressage! I really liked how the test was specialized for Icelandics and I enjoyed getting to practice the precision required for each exercise. The progress Framtíð and I made from the first run-through to the last was so rewarding. In the middle of one dressage test practice, Framtíð was bitten by a giant fly and turned into a rodeo horse. She did a buck-rear-jump, which was pretty funny, as we then had to continue the test just like nothing had happened at all.

After long days of learning, caring for our horses, meeting new people, and riding hard, the US Team would be reunited for dinner each night. Our evenings were spent as a group playing foosball, pool, or having races and cartwheel contests as the sun was setting. Liesl won most of those.

### LEARNING

We also had "country night," where each country shared a piece of their culture. Some of the most hilarious skits included the Swedish team trying to assemble an IKEA table as fast as they could, and the French team miming a stereotypical French person with a baguette. Our team created a dance to Texas Hold 'Em, resulting in a lot of giggles and the song being stuck in our heads the entire week.

On Wednesday, the horses were given the day off, while the participants went on an excursion to the Nationales Pferdezentrum Bern to see the Vaulting Championships—which inspired us all to try to learn how to vault. As part of our outing, we also got the chance to sample Swiss cheeses, but not just any old cheese: cheese that was aged with a different genre of music playing. They were really flavorful, especially the rap cheese! It was an honor to immerse ourselves into the culture while we were in Switzerland.

Goti fra Baunehøj, ridden by Liesl Kolbe. Photo by Lumikki Equine Photo.

Ernir frá Tröð, ridden by Greta Alsauskas. Photo by Lumikki Equine Photo.

Throughout the training days, there were many other fascinating learning experiences. We had three presentations on various topics; the one that interested me the most was a study on the rider's weight and how it affects the horse's ability to perform.

### COMPETING

After a whirlwind few days, it was time for the competition! There was so much preparation, planning, and excitement ahead of these two days. Our remarkable country leader, Greeley O'Connor, helped us calm our nerves by starting with a grounding activity and assisted us with getting the horses ready before each ride, helping us feel less chaotic and rushed.

The classes included: tölt, four- and five-gait, pace, trail, flag race, and dressage. The level of competition, the quality of horses, and the skillful riding were so eye-opening. It is one thing to get to watch stellar performances, but to actually participate in them was incredible. Because we were all so focused and dialed in, it is challenging to remember much from the competition. One thing I do remember is hearing our incredible team leader and official cheerleader, Maria Octavo, screaming USA! USA! while we were showing on the oval track.

Each rider would ride for themself, as well as to earn points for their international team. In the preliminaries, generally, there were anywhere from 15 to 25 riders in each class, in five to six heats, so keeping track of time was crucial. My Framtíð, a five-gaited horse who is a tad on the lazy side (in a good way), required a spirited warm-up on the pace track ahead of each class, forcing me to pay close attention to the time so I made it back to the track to compete.

I rode trail class for my international team, which ended up going very well for us. I was so excited to place fifth out of 24 riders. The trail course was one of the most elaborate courses I've ever ridden, and it gave me so many good ideas to use at home. I was so grateful for Framtíð: She was very willing, and we were able to create a trusting bond that helped a lot when approaching the various elements, especially the podium, which we had only practiced from the ground. She and I had built such a good connection that, by the end of the week, she confidently climbed right up onto the podium for me.

The second day of the competition was the finals. I was so proud to see my teammate Brynja ride Dís frá Hólakoti in the T3 final. It was thrilling to compete in full classes with so many awesome riders and beautiful horses. Because the show was so exciting, and so quick, I hope the organizers will consider adding B-finals to future Youth Cups, so that more participants will get a chance to ride on the second day.

### THE FUTURE

After a jam-packed week, it was over. The whole experience will remain with me forever, because it brought so many people together, uniting us. It was so inspiring to gather with an international community as captivated with the Icelandic horse as I am.

Personally, this experience showed me a glimpse into the future: It showed me that these young ambassadors of the breed will continue training, breeding, teaching, and competing with the Icelandic horse. Before

I went to Switzerland, I wasn't sure an Icelandic horse-related job was in my future. But after being there, I know for sure that these horses will always be with me and that I want to pursue this path in some way.

It is so important that youth riders get to have international opportunities like this. We are so spread out here in the US, it is challenging to see each other frequently for competitions and events. As Gundula Sharman, the FEIF Director of Youth Work, said during the opening ceremony, "The Youth Cup shows us that we aren't different from one another, and just because we live in another country we don't have to be strangers. If we know each other, then we understand each other." This sentiment spoke to me as not only a strong parallel to the Icelandic horse community at large, but also to life and larger worldviews.

I encourage other youth riders to try out for the FEIF Youth Cup, if they can. The process of applying and preparing my tests and videos was such a good learning experience on its own. While it was scary to put myself out there, and it required a lot of hard work and practice to qualify, it was well worth it. I am beyond grateful for this community who helped me attend this event, bond with my teammates, meet so many peers from other countries, and learn more about myself.

And I never thought in a million years I would be sleeping in an underground bunker for a week!

**RESOURCES**

For more information about the FEIF Youth Cup, see https://icelandics.org/youth and https://www.feif.org/youth-work-dept/youth-cup/ or contact the USIHC Youth Leader at youth@icelandics.org.

Top, Team USA at the very formal opening ceremony of the international FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland. Middle, the very informal closing ceremony, by which time the riders were all good friends. Both photos by Aja Jennings. Bottom, a sudden rainstorm provided the teams with a very muddy bonding experience, as they helped evacuate horses from flooded stalls. Photo by Miette Jennings. "Before I went to Switzerland," says Miette, "I wasn't sure an Icelandic horse-related job was in my future. But after being there, I know for sure that I want to pursue this path in some way."

# AMERICAN HISTORY

by Charles Fergus

In August 2024, Þorgeir Guðlaugsson judged an Icelandic horse show at Sólheimar Farm in Tunbridge, VT. Afterward, he and his partner Els van der Meulen visited us in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom so that Þorgeir could hunt through local records for information on Icelandic horses that lived in our remote corner of the Green Mountain State in the late 1800s.

My wife, Nancy Marie Brown, and I own four Icelandics and ride on back roads and woods trails near our home here in Caledonia County. At the USIHC's 2024 annual meeting on February 24, we enjoyed an online presentation, "The Early History of Icelandic Horses in America: The First Hundred Years," that Þorgeir presented. We were astonished to learn that Icelandics had been brought to two farms in Lyndon, the Vermont town in which we live, more than 135 years ago and were featured at the Caledonia County Fair. In advance of Þorgeir's and Els's visit, our friend Beth Kanell, a skilled researcher and writer, found many photos of possible Icelandics at the farms in question (though most of these horses were Morgans or Welsh ponies, in Þorgeir's opinion). She also arranged for Þorgeir to have access to the archives in the Shores Museum in Lyndon Center and the Vail Museum on the Lyndon campus of Northern Vermont University, so he could do additional research on this early importation of Icelandics to the US.

Þorgeir describes himself as "endlessly curious." He is passionate about documenting the use and presence of Iceland's horses in other lands, which he sometimes refers to as "the hidden history of Icelandic horses abroad." He is an open, friendly man in his 60s, a native Icelander who now lives in northern Holland, where he works as a translator. He and Els have a small farm with four horses—Icelandics, of course; formerly they had as many as 30. Both are accomplished competition riders, but today neither rides actively. Þorgeir judges 10 to 15 Icelandic shows annually, from small local competitions like the one at Sólheimar up to the World Championships.

A slide from Þorgeir Guðlaugsson's presentation at the 2024 USIHC Annual Meeting in February. Note the announcement of a "Four-in-hand Iceland Pony Team" at a Vermont fair in 1889.

## AT THE 1889 FAIR

During his visit to northern Vermont, Þorgeir combed through photographs, letters, scrapbooks, and the daily records of the two local farms that had kept and bred Icelandics. The earliest mention he has found on these local horses was an 1888 newspaper article that reported on the activities of Luther Burnham Harris, a gentleman farmer who owned 650 acres. The article stated: "Among his specialties in the horse kind, and in fact the only thoroughbreds, are six Iceland ponies. One stallion and one mare were imported from Iceland and their progeny are being bred to the market. The four-year-old stallion weighs only 520 pounds but can easily carry a man on his back and make 12 miles an hour on the road. The horses are a beautiful dark bay, gentle and hardy, and breed to color very accurately."

Harris's operation was considered a "stock farm," and he specialized in livestock from the United Kingdom: Hereford, Devon, and Angus cattle and Shropshire sheep. He had contacts with livestock dealers in the UK, and, concluded Thorgeir, "If he imported the original Icelandic stallion and mare himself, he might have done that with the help of those dealers." The farm was a successful venture, with Harris's animals winning blue ribbons at agricultural fairs throughout New England.

Þorgeir has also learned that Icelandic horses were present in the Canadian province of Quebec, some 30 miles north of here, as early as 1874. In 1883 some Icelandics were sold at an auction in Sherbrook, QC, and in 1884 examples of the breed were shown at the Grand Dominion Exhibition in Montreal. Þorgeir speculates that Harris may have been in contact with Canadian dealers of Icelandics and could have acquired his first horses from them. Harris went on to sell his livestock to "various places in the country, even to the Pacific Coast," Þorgeir said. He also found an article stating that Harris had sold an Icelandic horse to someone living on Nantucket Island off the Massachusetts coast.

A September 1889 article in the *Caledonian* (a newspaper still being published as the *Caledonian-Record*) described activities at the North Caledonia Fair, where "The four-in-hand Icelandic ponies, driven by Master Willie Harris, attracted much attention." William Harris was Luther Harris's son. Perusing the photo album Beth Kanell had located, Þorgeir identified a photo showing Master Willie and his four-in-hand Icelandics. He then drove to the fairgrounds and located the spot where the photo was taken.

## "VEST POCKET HORSES"

The senior Harris had a longtime friend named Theodore N. Vail; both made considerable money in the early days of the telephone business, mainly in Brooklyn,

While visiting Vermont in August, Þorgeir was delighted to find a photograph of the "Four-in-hand Iceland Pony Team" driven by Master Willie Harris. The Icelandics "attracted much attention," according to a 1889 newspaper report of the Northern Caledonia Fair. Photo courtesy of the Vail Museum.

NY. Vail visited Harris on his Vermont farm and was much taken by the beauty of the area. Vail started buying land in the vicinity, including a farm next to Harris's, and called his property Speedwell Farms. In 1889, Luther Harris and his wife, Olive, were divorced, and Vail purchased their farm.

Like Harris, Vail specialized in pedigreed livestock from Europe. He kept various kinds of horses, including French coach horses, Percherons, Icelandics, and Welsh ponies. Vail may have bought Harris's herd, which would have become the foundation of Icelandic horse breeding on Speedwell Farms.

Þorgeir's research has turned up many newspaper stories about Vail's horses. In the 1890s, Vail's Icelandics were shown at the Caledonia County Fair and at other local fairs, as well as at the Vermont State Fair. Some reports from 1890 to 1910: "An entirely new exhibit for this section will be some Iceland ponies entered by Theo N. Vail. They are handsome little animals and will be especially attractive to children." At the Northern Caledonia Fair of 1893, an imported Icelandic stallion by the name of Jack was entered: "The children were greatly interested in the Iceland ponies, Jack and Laddie, the mare Maggie with filly, and the little colt a week old that weighs only 30 pounds."

Another Vermont newspaper exclaimed that "Greater contrasts in horse flesh [are] seldom seen than between a Percheron stallion and an Iceland pony from the Speedwell Farm. Both would be worthy of blue ribbons, but they are as unlike as a cathedral clock and a ladies' gold watch." The story continued: "The Iceland pony, Taffy, is a little gem of a horse of about 400 pounds' weight. He was imported by the Speedwell Farms in 1893. He was shown with the pony mare, Molly, with filly foal." The newspaper accounts focused on the small size of the Icelandics, which were invariably referred to as ponies and described with cute terms such as "little equine pets" and "vest pocket horses."

Photos that Þorgeir examined depict very small, fine-boned horses that certainly look like Icelandics. Usually they are shown drawing carts and small wagons, often driven by children or young adults. Some photos show children riding the horses. Accounts that Þorgeir found didn't state whether the horses were ridden in gaits such as tölt or flying pace.

## COAST TO COAST

As he reported in his presentation at the USIHC annual meeting, Þorgeir has documented Icelandic horses scattered throughout the US in the second half of the 19th century. From Boston in 1871: "A beautiful match[ed] pair of black Iceland Ponies, 11 hands high, step beautifully together, run in single or double harness, carries children, thoroughly broken, temperate—though extremely fast."

From Beloit, WI, in 1873: "Messrs. Bishop and Austin recently imported a drove of Shetland and Iceland ponies, twenty-five arriving yesterday. They are to be kept for breeding purposes. They are valued at $45,000."

Other places where Icelandic horses showed up in the late 1800s and early 1900s include Suitland, MD; Richmond, IN (the pony in question was said to be "carnivorous, if he gets a chance . . . known to devour very young chickens straying within his reach"); Springboro, PA; Maquoketa, IA; Gypsum, KS; Fort Collins, CO; and Manitoba, Canada.

One "Wee Icelandic Pony" found a home at the Bronx Zoo. The news article incorrectly characterized the breed as a "dwarfed variety of the Arabian horse." The article did get it right, however, in saying that "Unless the keepers steel their hearts against coddling the little Icelandic visitor with choice alfalfa and oats, he is likely to die, a victim of luxury. The average Icelandic pony is used to foraging in all sorts of weather on barren moors and rocky heights. He can scratch with his hoofs through a thick layer of snow for frozen moss."

## HORSES AND PEOPLE

Þorgeir has written about Icelandic horses since he graduated from the University of Iceland in 1987 with a degree in geography and a minor in Icelandic history. His contributions to the world of the Icelandic horse are legion: As well as judging hundreds of competitions, he has produced materials for educating sport judges and people learning to be judges.

When in his twenties, he was on the editorial staff of *Eiðfaxi*, a magazine dedicated to the Icelandic horse. Over the course of 10 years, he put together a book titled *Hestar og Menn* ("Horses and People"), with many interviews of trainers, breeders, and competitors, which charted the development of the Icelandic breed into a modern riding horse.

Þorgeir also contributed two chapters to the monumental 2006 book, *The Icelandic Horse*, by Gísli B. Björnsson and Hjalti Jón Sveinsson, dealing with competition, shows, and the Icelandic horse abroad.

Nancy and I greatly enjoyed Þorgeir's and Els's visit and wished they could have stayed longer. But they needed to get in their rental car and head south—to Gloucester, MA. Þorgeir had found an enticing news article from that city from the late 1800s stating that a schooner had arrived in port, sailing from Ísafjörður, Iceland, and carrying 100,000 pounds of "fletched halibut," two foxes, two cats, two dogs, and an "Iceland pony." We look forward to learning more from Þorgeir on the history of the Icelandic horse in America.

## RESOURCES

You can follow Þorgeir's research on his Facebook page, Anecdotes of Icelandic Horse History at https://www.facebook.com/groups/387579584660638.

# THE NATIONAL TEAM

by Jana Meyer and Nicki Esdorn

As reported in the last issue of the *Quarterly*, the USIHC established a National Team this year to support our top competition riders and horses. Hoping these riders will serve as role models for our broader community, a Code of Conduct was developed which includes guidance on the welfare of the horse, good horsemanship, and good sportsmanship.

Among other qualifications, all National Team members must have a minimum average score of at least 6.0 in our National Rankings in the individual, group open, and/or P2 Pace Race rankings. These scores may be obtained through our Virtual Shows (if a rider's horse is located outside the US) and through in-person competitions nationally. All riders must compete in one US-based show each year, but this can be in any class and there are no scoring qualifications.

The current members of the USIHC National Team are (in alphabetical order): Heidi Benson, Laura Benson, Carrie Lyons-Brandt, Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir, Caeli Cavanagh, Lori Cretney, Ásta Covert, Alex Dannenmann, Terral Hill, Virginia Lauridsen, Lucy Nold, Jeff Rose, and Alex Venable. The National Team Leader is Jana Meyer.

How do you train for top-level competition? Says Alexandra Dannenmann, "I think the most important part of my training program is riding outside on the trails."

In late September, the National Team held its first training event at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, IA with Team Trainer Olil Amble from Iceland. The team members, who came from Washington, California, Oregon, Colorado, Kentucky, Iowa, and Germany, spent the week working individually with Olil, watching each other's training sessions, and setting the tone for collaboration going forward. "The experience was absolutely incredible," the team reported on the USIHC Facebook page. "We learned so much, connected as a team, and are all feeling very inspired for the year ahead. This is the beginning of something very exciting." The training event was timed to coincide with a three-day World Ranking Show at Harmony Icelandics.

Competing at the top level requires a very talented, fit, willing, and well-trained equine partner, so in Issue Three 2024 of the *Quarterly*, we asked Ásta, Caeli, Carrie, Heidi, and Jeff to tell us a little about how they work with their horses. For this issue, we spoke with Lori, Alex D., and Alex V.

We asked each member of the National Team, "How do you get your horse physically fit and trained for the top level of competition?" Then, "How do you prepare and motivate your horse mentally for consistently high performance?" Finally, we asked each rider, "What is the most fun you have with your horse?"

### LORI

Baldursbrá and I have been together for 13 years. I got her when she was two years old, and it has been an exulting journey. In training, I use a lot of lateral work to warm my horse up and to see if she is between the aids. I also use dressage work to help build topline, strength, and balance. Physical fitness is as important as stamina to set the horse up for success in competion.

Baldursbrá can lack forward energy under saddle, therefore it is important to find things she enjoys doing to help her build fitness and stamina. I ride her mostly in open fields that offer the ability

"Baldursbrá can lack forward energy," says Lori Cretney. "Therefore it is important to find things she enjoys doing to help her build fitness. I ride her mostly in open fields." Photo by Mouse Hendrick.

to ride different gaits. Some fields offer stretches of slow tölt or the capability to do speed changes. Other fields offer hill work. Galloping up a hill not only helps with physical strength, it also assists in getting Baldursbrá to be more forward-thinking. I also try to do one or two days of groundwork to see how she is moving. This usually involves longeing and going over trot poles.

I have a lot of variety in my training so that Baldursbrá does not get mentally tired. I also vary the rides: some are short and others are longer. She gets a break a couple of days a week and is turned out on pasture every day. I also have started training her bridleless. This challenges her in other ways, gives her more freedom, and gets me really in tune with her. She enjoys being ridden without the bridle and she will move out more.

Bridleless riding is exciting and challenging for both of us. Trying to figure out how to ask for an exercise such as a leg yield, turn on the forehand, or turn on the haunches without a bridle can be interesting. Thinking it out is important, and how you set up the horse is fundamental. You always want to set your horse up for success, even if it means breaking an exercise down into baby steps.

Lastly, both Baldursbrá and I enjoy trail riding. Not only does riding over different terrain help build stamina, it is really fun finding a stretch on the trail where you can tölt at various speeds. When we lived in Wisconsin, we got to see a lot of nature, such as deer, geese, raccoons, opossums, rabbits, and skunks.

Don't be so ambitious that you forget about what really matters, says Alexandra Dannenmann: "Your friendship with your horse."

**ALEX D.**

I've been training my two competition horses, Ára and Spaði, consistently for the last 1.5 years, but we have known each other several years longer. My training methods include regular trail riding, dressage work, oval track training, and groundwork, such as longeing and treadmill work.

I try to keep the training of my horses as versatile as possible and, thankfully, I have access to oval tracks, a pace track, an indoor arena, and a round pen, as well as a water treadmill. That allows me to create a very interesting and diversified training program for my horses.

But I think the most important part of my training program is riding outside on the trails. I can say from experience that nothing is more important than the mental well-being of the horse. And for that, trail riding is extremely important. If they don't feel well and don't have the willingness to perform for us, we can't expect our horses to achieve their highest potential. And even if they did, we would not deserve it.

Equally important are training breaks and days off, where the horses can just be horses and don't have to deal with us. For a horse, constantly trying to figure out how to behave and perform around the rider is very exhausting. We have to give them a break from us on a regular basis, so that they can look forward to engaging with us again.

My horses and I definitely have the most fun together when we are trail riding. Of course, you can also seriously train horses out on the trail, but I do try to keep our trail rides, most of the time, as a compensation for the more serious training days. We have a lot of fun riding with friends, and

"Bridleless riding is exciting and challenging," notes Lori Cretney.

"My horse has a particularly difficult brain," says Alexandra Venable. "He's not a horse that trusts people easily, and I know I can't let him down." Photo by Katie Daly.

sometimes just race up the hills and have a good time. Trail riding is also always a great reminder of why we do all the training and of how it all got started. It is important to not be so ambitious about competing that you forget about what really matters—your friendship with your horse.

As an international trainer, instructor, and sports judge, to me the welfare of the horse is paramount at all times, and I have proven myself over the years to be a strong defender of such. It is my driving force and my motivation in all areas of my work: as an educator for trainers and instructors; as a rider, a sports judge, a clinician, and an instructor; and as the owner and keeper of my horses. I'm part of the international Social License to Operate (SLO) group and, as such, am directly involved in developing future improvements in equine sports, to further protect our horses. We will never allow our ambitions to overshadow the love we have for our horses and will never compromise their trust and friendship.

### ALEX V.

My main Icelandic sport horse, Oddi, is owned by my mother. He's been with me for about three years, and it has been quite the journey. Not only has he helped me get back into Icelandic competition, he was also one of the main horses I used when I took the FEIF trainer's exam in 2022.

To train for physical fitness and stamina, I take my time doing a lot of slow work in the beginning, with many dressage exercises in walk, slow tölt, and trot. I vary the work with trail rides, in addition to arena work. I also like to do one groundwork session a week, so I can see how he is moving without a rider on his back. I really like to make sure he is both soft and flexible in his muscles, but also is building up his strength.

My horse has a particularly difficult brain, and my main focus with him is to make every work session a positive experience. He's not a horse that trusts people easily, and I know I can't let him down. I have to make sure he doesn't get stressed, so I always have to balance progress with making sure he stays calm and relaxed. He has really challenged me to try different methods and to take my time to find the correct answer. He can't be pushed into doing the right thing, but needs to be asked and guided instead.

Even though he is my main competition horse, he is also my favorite horse to take out on the trail. Whether it's out on a group ride, a solo ride, out on the beach, or even at an obstacle course, he always does what he is asked and is happy to keep going. I've also started to work more on pace with him, and it has been fun to see his speedier side. He loves open spaces, where he can open up and really fly.

### RESOURCES

Information on how to qualify for the team and the team's Code of Conduct is available in the National Team document on the USIHC website (https://icelandics.org) under Ride—Competition.

"I always have to balance progress with making sure he stays calm and relaxed," says Alexandra Venable. Photo by Katie Daly.

# SHOEING & HEALTH PART 2

by Gabriele Meyer

The keynote speaker at this year's FEIF Conference in Luxembourg was Michael Weishaupt, a veterinarian and professor at the Equine Hospital of the Vetsuisse Faculty, University of Zurich, Switzerland. Michael 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.

I reported on his talk in Issue Two 2024, focusing on what he had to say about shoeing practices for Icelandic competition horses and their effects on hoof health. In this issue, I will discuss his team's research on how shoeing influences horses' movement biomechanics.

In 2012, they examined the hooves of 133 Icelandic horses at four competitions in Europe and Iceland. The researchers found that—despite the horses' being shod according to the FEIF shoeing rules at the time—the majority exhibited a variety of deviations from what is considered to be a healthy hoof shape. The researchers warned that the hoof deviations they observed put excessive strain on the horses' hooves and legs.

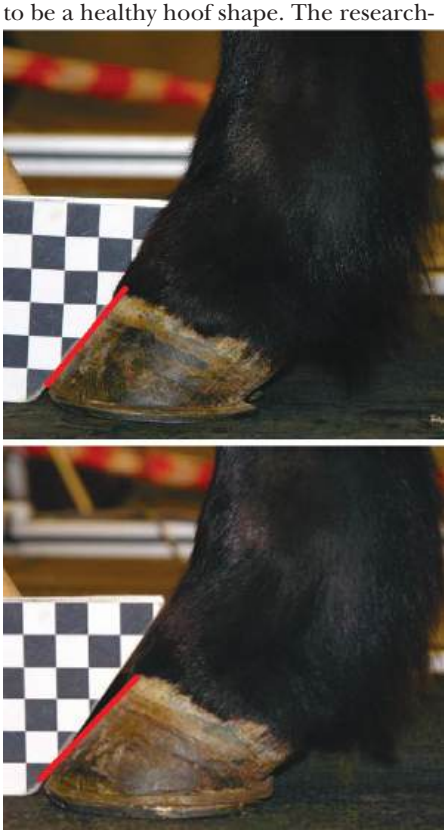


Illustration 1: These two photos show the difference in hoof conformation between normal shoeing (top) and competition shoeing (bottom).

Bernhard Podlech riding one of the test horses on the treadmill. Photo by Michael Weishaupt.

That so many competition horses were found to be incorrectly shod is not a coincidence—nor is it because Icelandic farriers lack skills. Competition riders work hand-in-hand with their farriers and know from experience that certain shoeing techniques can help improve a horse's tölt and trot rhythm and how high he lifts his front feet. So they instruct their farriers accordingly.

Michael's team became interested in exploring this effect in more detail. How and why do different shoeing techniques alter a horse's gait, and in particular, the tölt? Could the effect be quantified, thus making the discussions around the issue more objective? The data they had gathered at the four competition sites, they believed, could be used to shed some light on these questions. When the horses' Dorsal Hoof Length (DHL) was plotted against their tölt scores, the graph revealed a positive correlation between DHL and the score. In short, the longer the hoof, the higher the score for tölt.

To dive deeper into the biomechanics of this correlation, Michael and his team left the competition track. Instead, they went into their gait laboratory, where they have a unique high-speed treadmill that incorporates a force-measuring system. With this instrument, they can measure the timing of a horse's hooves and their impact forces on the ground (or on the treadmill surface, in this case).

### THE SET-UP

The test horses consisted of 13 Icelandics that had been assessed as fit and sound and that had been trained to be ridden on a treadmill. The horses were outfitted with reflective markers, so that, simultaneously with the treadmill data, the movements of their various body parts could be recorded by high-speed motion-capture cameras. Software guided the camera and interpreted the data. The researchers ana-

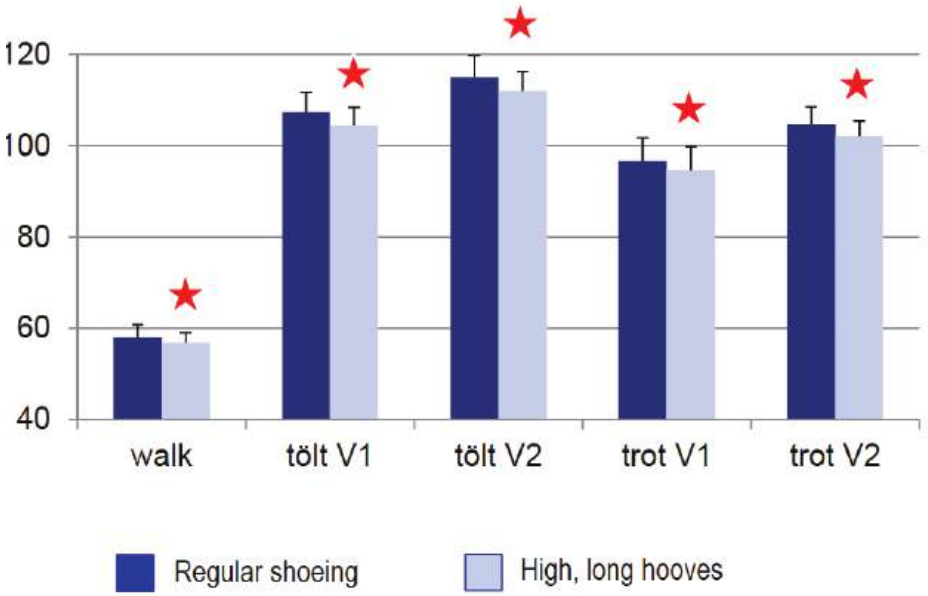



Illustration 2: This chart shows the impact of competition shoeing on stride frequency.

lyzed the horses' movements at the walk (1.35 meters/second), tölt and trot (the latter two at two speeds: 3.28 m/s and 3.90 m/s). Each horse went through two trials, during which the gait quality and posture were supervised by a judge.

For Trial 1, the horses were shod according to what was customary for Icelandic competitions at the time: They were trimmed for high and long hooves, and shod with 20x8 mm steel shoes, with pads and packing. The scientists labeled this shoeing technique SH ("H" for high); in this article, I will call it simply "competition shoeing."

Trial 2 took place a couple of weeks later. The horses had been trimmed and shod to normal hoof parameters. They were again wearing 20x8 mm shoes, but this time without pads or packing. The scientists labeled this technique SN ("N" for normal); I will call it "normal shoeing." The horses were again ridden on the treadmill, and their biomechanical parameters were measured once more at the same gaits and speeds as in Trial 1.

Competition shoeing resulted in front hooves with an average dorsal hoof wall that was 2.1 cm longer (+/- 0.5 cm) than the dorsal hoof wall of horses that were shod normally (see Illustration 1); the weight increase of the pads and packing, per hoof, was determined to be 273 g (± 50 g). For both shoeing conditions, the scientists recorded several temporal and kinematic parameters to characterize the biomechanics of walk, tölt, and trot (the latter two gaits at two speeds).

### STRIDE EFFECTS

A stride refers to one cycle of the horse's four legs each moving forward once. Watching a horse walking, we could define the start of a cycle when the right hind hoof touches the ground; then comes the right fore; followed by the left hind; the landing of the left forefoot concludes the cycle, and the horse has now made one stride. Accordingly, stride duration is the time it takes to conclude one cycle. Stride frequency describes how many strides the horse makes in one minute.

Michael's group could show that, compared to normal shoeing, competition shoeing leads to an increased stride duration in walk, tölt, and trot. This increase in stride duration was less distinct in walk and more distinct in the faster gaits. Because stride frequency and stride duration are interrelated, if the speed is kept constant, competition shoeing proportionally reduced the stride frequency slightly in walk, and reduced it a little more in tölt and trot, especially at the faster speeds (see Illustration 2).

### BEAT EFFECTS

Next, the researchers looked at the effects of shoeing on the correctness of the four-beat rhythm in walk and tölt. At least in theory, a correct walk and tölt should look and sound like four evenly spaced beats—we have talked about this extensively in the *Quarterly*. To quickly repeat, an important parameter when describing a four-beat gait is the lateral advanced placement (LAP), which is the time that

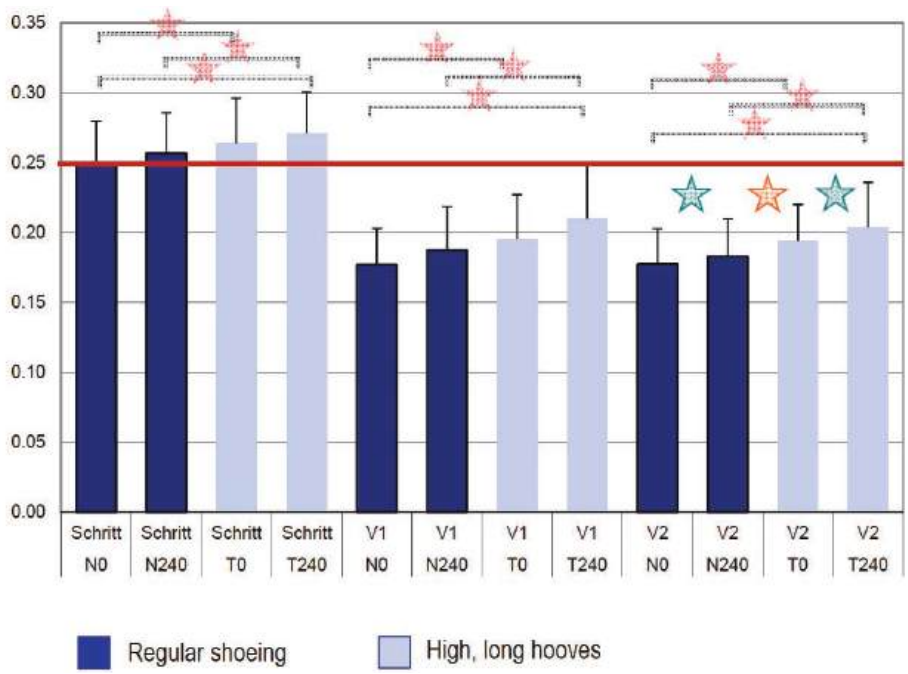



Illustration 3: This chart shows the correctness of the four-beat rhythm in walk (Schritt) and tölt at two speeds (V1 and V2) for normal shoeing conditions (T, dark blue) and for competition shoeing (T, light blue). For both shoeing conditions, horses wore either weighted boots of 240 g (N240 and T240), or no weighted boots (N0, T0). The red line indicates a LAP of 25%, which corresponds to a perfect four-beat rhythm.

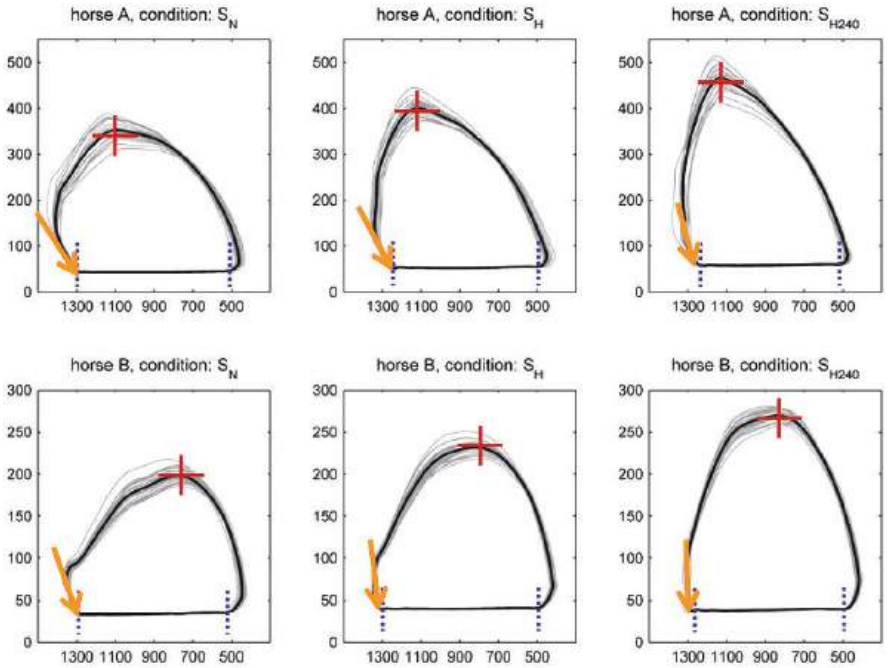



Illustration 4: The forelimb protraction and arc of flight of two horses (Horse A and Horse B) in tölt under three different shoeing conditions: normal shoeing (SN), competition shoeing (SH), and competition shoeing plus 240-gram weighted boots (SH240). For both horses, the height of the flight arc increased with competition shoeing. With boots, the maximum became even higher, and the arc's shape became more pointed. The arc did not, however, become wider.

passes between the hooves on the same side of the horse's body making contact with the ground. This period is often expressed as a percentage of the duration of one stride cycle. As the total duration of a stride is set to be 100%, the LAP of a perfectly isochronous four-beat walk or tölt is exactly a quarter of this, or 25%. (On a side note, in flying pace, the lateral legs hit the ground almost simultaneously, therefore the LAP is near 0%. In a good two-beat trot, the LAP is 50%.)

LAP can be used to scientifically distinguish a pacey tölt from a trotty tölt. If the LAP value is lower than 25%, the tölt is said to be pacey. There is no exact cut-off point after which a tölt becomes pacey—the boundaries are somewhat fluid—but a skilled observer can see, and certainly hear, that the lateral legs, instead of moving independently, move at almost the same time. If the tendency toward pace is subtle, it is not noticeable to most observers. However, with the emergence of high-speed cameras and software, it can be shown that even a tölt judged as a true four-beat gait doesn't quite reach the LAP of 25% stipulated by theory; instead, high-quality tölt hovers in the 22-24% range, while low-quality tölt can have a LAP of 16-18%. Conversely, if the tölt is trotty, the diagonal legs seem to move together; the LAP, in this case, will be greater than 25% (for example, 30%).

Illustration 3 describes an experiment in which Michael's team added another parameter: the absence or presence of boots. These are the kind of boots that wrap (or are buckled) around the hooves, and can be used to add weight to the hooves. These boots come in different weights; according to the 2024 FEIF Sport Rules, boots (of any kind) may not weigh more than 250 grams per hoof. For this experiment, the researchers used boots weighing 240 grams. The researchers measured the LAP in walk and in two tölt speeds under four conditions: normal shoeing, normal shoeing plus weight boots, competition shoeing, and competition shoeing plus weight boots.

Comparing the height of the bars in Illustration 3, we see that the walk, with a LAP near the 25% line (in red), is quite isochronous with normal shoeing. It became slightly more diagonal with the boots adding some weight (LAP>25%).

At both tölt speeds, by contrast, the horses shod normally (V1/N0 and V2/N0) seemed quite pacey, with a LAP of around 18%. Adding weight boots helped to improve their rhythm only to a small degree (V1/N240 and V2/N240). The biggest effect occurred, at both speeds of tölt, when competition shoeing and weight boots were used together: Here, the LAP got into the 21% range (V1/T240 and V2/T240).

## ARC OF FLIGHT

The researchers also examined the flight path of the horse's forelimbs in tölt. The arc of flight is influenced by such factors as the horse's general conformation, straightness of the leg, hoof balance, speed, and, of course, the weight of the hoof and its attachments.

How would the arc change with added weight? Would it get higher, longer, or both? The answer is given in Illustration 4, which shows the flight arcs of the forelimbs of two individual horses, A and B, under three different shoeing conditions: shod normally (SN), with competition shoeing (SH), or with competition shoeing along with 240g boots (SH240).

Because no two horses are the same, Horse A and Horse B exhibited slightly different arc patterns, when compared with each other. But for both horses, the height of the flight arc increased with competition shoeing. When the horse was additionally equipped with 240g boots, the protraction maximum became even higher, and the shape of the flight arc changed to have a more pointed appearance. At the same time, the distance between the blue dotted lines at the bottom of Illustration 4 became shorter under competition shoeing conditions, indicating that the protraction arc, while becoming higher, got shorter.

## BREAK-OVER

The way hooves are trimmed and shod influences the mechanics of their break-over. The break-over is defined as the period at the very end of the stance phase, when the hoof gets unloaded, the heel lifts off the ground and then, via a hoof rotation around the tip of the toe, the toe leaves the ground too.

Farriers have long known that shoeing with long toes and high heels delays the break-over. This delay slows down the front legs relative to the hind legs and is frequently used in an attempt to make a horse's tölt less pacey. But at the same time, a delayed break-over increases the mechanical stresses acting on the inner hoof structure and leg tendons and is

thought to lead to, or at least to contribute to, lameness issues such as navicular syndrome.

The break-over is a complicated mechanical process in a horse's foot, affecting many inner structures, as well as the tendons and joints involved. Michael and his research team studied the distal interphalangeal joint, or coffin joint, and the forces that act upon it during break-over under different shoeing conditions. They determined that the length of the cranial lever arm—the horizontal distance between the break-over point at the toe to the centre of rotation of the coffin joint—significantly affects the forces on that joint. They found that shoeing with long and high hooves leads to a 23% increase in the length of the cranial lever arm, resulting in an increase in the forces on the coffin joint at the walk of 19%, at the trot of 17-23%, and at the tölt of 14%. These numbers suggest that competition shoeing may have a negative impact on the horses' foot health.

## CHANGING THE RULES

Icelandic horse competitions, as we know, are typically performed on oval tracks, where the horses show either their four or five gaits or one of their specialty gaits, tölt or pace. Competitions worldwide follow FEIF rules. As FEIF states on their website, "The performance of horse and rider is judged mainly through the quality of the gaits." Traditionally, the FEIF rules have allowed special shoeing methods—trimming for long hooves, in combination with the use of heavy metal shoes, pads with packing material, and weighted hoof boots—to be used to enhance the quality of a horse's gaits. Michael and his research team found that this type of shoeing does indeed correlate with higher tölt scores.

The researchers attributed this correlation to several factors that aid gait quality, particularly at the tölt. They document that competition shoeing:

—Reduces the stride frequency, which equals longer strides at a given speed.

—Enhances the regularity of the gait (clearness of the four-beat).

—Increases the height of the front limb flight arc, leading to an extravagant-looking reaching gait. Contrary to common belief, however, it did not increase the length of the protraction, but instead decreased it.

—Increases the break-over duration of the front limbs, making the horse's tölt less pacey.

But there is a catch. While competition shoeing may well increase tölt scores, it has unintended consequences that adversely affect gait mechanics and compromise the soundness of the horse's hoof and locomotor system:

—Higher stride and limb impulses result in higher mechanical stresses on limbs, tendons, and internal structures of the hooves.

—A longer lever arm, due to a long toe, increases the forces on the coffin joint, leading to additional stresses and strains.

In their Hoof Study, reported in Issue Two 2024 of the *Quarterly*, the researchers found that the vast majority of the 133 Icelandic competition horses they tested had one or more types of hoof pathologies. Most of those pathologies originated from long hooves. They proposed a change to the FEIF rules on shoeing to lower the dorsal hoof wall length to 9 cm (9.5 for horses taller than 144 cm), as a compromise between horse welfare concerns and gait performance.

FEIF acknowledged the results of the Hoof Study and changed the General Rules and Regulations to reflect the research of Michael's team: The maximum permissible hoof length was reduced by half a centimeter. This rule change went into effect in 2015 for breeding shows and in 2016 for sport competitions. In light of the increasing scrutiny of all equestrian disciplines by the riding and non-riding public alike, the Hoof Study is a good example of how science can guide equestrian associations in their decision-making.

So, can we give FEIF and ourselves a pat on the shoulder for a job well done and forget about it? Not quite yet, I think. Michael was asked to present his team's research at the 2024 FEIF Conference because, even today, it provides food for thought. Are the current FEIF shoeing rules enough to safeguard the well-being of our horses, or will they change again if future research leads to even more insights?

And as we move forward in time, will our likes and dislikes change and will the FEIF Judging Guidelines and their interpretations further evolve? How do you feel about a perfect four-beat tölt rhythm and spectacular front leg action now, knowing they are not only the result of excellent breeding and skillful riding, but also of shoeing techniques that may come at a price that ultimately the horse will have to pay?

Under the current FEIF Judging Guidelines, "roomy and high movements" are required to obtain high tölt scores. But the guidelines also ask for qualities like balance, suppleness, expression, and harmony—properties that are more difficult to judge, harder to see from the stands, and have much less of a "wow" factor. Could these qualities of tölt be more important than high front legs? The question remains, are we perhaps paying too much attention to the icing instead of the actual cake?

## RESOURCES


Weishaupt, M.A., et al., 2024. Effect of competition shoeing on movement biomechanics and hoof health. Seminar at the FEIF Conference Luxembourg 2024. https://www.feif.org/2024/02/13/mike-weishaupt-and-johannes-amplatz-at-the-feif-conference-2024/

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# HOW TO LOSE WEIGHT

by Guðmar Pétursson

For a horse to be overweight is not healthy. It's also not healthy for a horse to be underweight or skinny. Everyone knows this, but it can be hard to keep a horse at the perfect weight.

We have about 30 to 40 horses here in our barn at Hestaland in Iceland, and the amount of hay each of them gets is hugely different. Some horses get just the minimum amount of grass hay at morning, lunchtime, and evening, with access to a salt and mineral block. Other horses get all the hay they can eat, basically, and the problem is to get them to eat enough. They also get pounds of grain and beet fiber and biotin and vitamins and other supplements with it every day, and it's just barely enough to keep them at a good weight. Every horse is different.

How do we know if a horse is overweight? I had a good conversation with associate professor Guðrún Stefánsdóttir, a specialist in Equine Exercise Physiology and Feeding and Nutrition at Hólar University. She and professor Sigríður Björnsdóttir created the Body Condition Scoring System for Icelandic Horses currently used by FEIF (see page 40).

While horses that score from 2.5 to 4.0 are considered by FEIF fit to be shown at a breeding show, the best score is 3.0: Riding Horse Condition. In their detailed description, Guðrún and Sigríður write, "Two to four of the rear ribs are felt by touch (not visible). Over them is a thin layer of loose fat (approximately 1 cm). The croup is convex and muscled. The back is muscled and flat (no crease or ridge). The coat is shiny and looks good."

By 4.0, the horse is Fat. Guðrún and Sigríður write, "Thick layer of fat covers the ribs. No ribs can be felt by palpation. The back is very filled and often [there is a] crease down it."

It's interesting to think back in history, back to the olden days, and see how nature used to take care of this problem. I can only talk about how it was in Iceland, but not so long ago we'd just let the seasons help us. The horse would naturally get fat in the summertime. In the fall they'd do okay—they'd be able to maintain their weight. In the winter they'd lose a little bit of weight, and in the spring they'd start to gain it again.

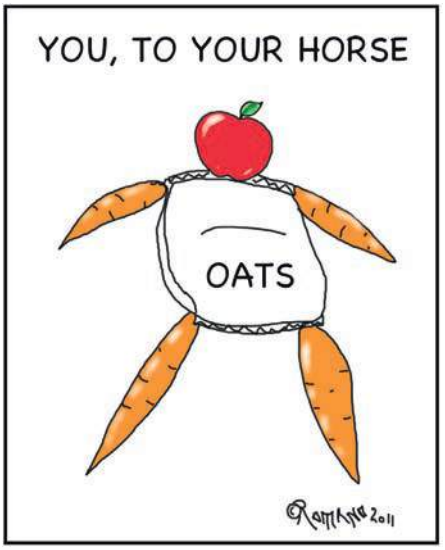
At that time, haying was more difficult. Summer in Iceland is short, sometimes too wet, and we had just regular square bales at that time. So it was sometimes limited how much horses could be fed in the wintertime. They would roam in big pastures, where they would find a little something to eat, but they would never come out of the winter overweight.

Now things are changing. We have a very good way of making hay in Iceland, with round bales that we wrap in plastic, and we have fertilizers. So we can make excellent quality hay in almost any kind of summer. We now have the ability to feed our horses excellent quality hay all year round, however much we want to. There's plenty of it.

On top of that, we are limiting the amount the horses move around. They stand around a lot of the time in stalls or in small paddocks, and they're not able to exercise their extra weight off, as they would in nature. We're also more seasonal in our riding. People ride more in the spring and summer, and less in the winter.

### FEED RIGHT

If we have an overweight horse, and we want to help it lose weight, the first thing to understand is that this is long-term work. There are no quick solutions. It takes some stamina to control the feeding and to control the training—because there needs to be training involved. The horse needs to be exercised. And we need to adjust the feeding according to the amount of training.




Let's say we're riding quite a bit in the summer, four to five days a week, and we're feeding good hay and a little bit of grain. Now there comes a time in the winter when we're not riding so much. We take a break for a month, or even two to three months—then the feeding needs to be adjusted. I think that's often how a horse's weight problem starts. We get into a certain kind of feeding routine. We've figured out what works. But once the training goes down, the amount of food needs to go down too.

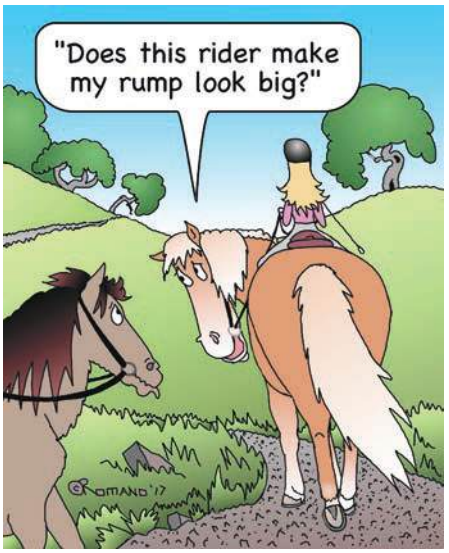
If we need to limit the horse's food, it's better to give hay more often, but less of it at a time. A good trick is to feed lesser quality hay—obviously not bad hay or moldy hay, but plain grass hay which has more roughage, more stems. That way he has something to be nibbling at, to keep his digestive system going, but it's not very nutritious, so he needs to eat more of it to get the nutrition that he needs. Stay away from the stronger stuff—no alfalfa, not even fertilized hay. Stay away from all fattening grains, obviously. Give him minerals and vitamins as needed. But stay away from the extra fat and calories.

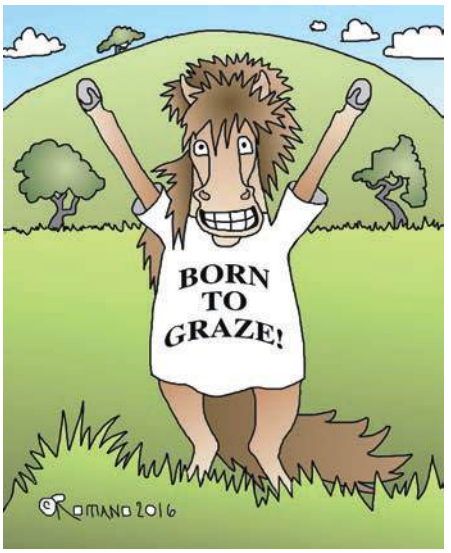
We still need to give him a normal amount of hay, though. It's difficult for me to be accurate about what is "normal." It depends on the hay. We have to have the hay tested. We have to figure out, maybe together with a veterinarian, what's the minimum amount of hay to safely give this horse each day, and split that amount up into as many feedings as we can.

### TRAIN SLOWLY

In the winter, if the horse stays outside, we can help him lose a little bit of weight just by limiting his hay, because it takes a lot of energy to stay warm. But if the horse is being cared for in a barn situation, and gets a limited amount of exercise, we need to add more exercise.

It's important to go slowly when we start exercising an overweight horse. Losing that extra weight is not going to happen in one, two, three, or even four weeks. It's going to take months.



The exercise program needs to be based on the horse we have. If the horse is really fat, so fat that he can barely move, we obviously have to start easy with the training. It's always better to exercise more often and not do so much at a time. If the horse is hugely overweight, we need to start with long walking rides. We need to do more groundwork, maybe some lungeing, and try to help the horse get active and moving. And we need to do it regularly, the more regularly the better—ideally five to six times a week.

Don't go too far or too fast, though. Don't push him too hard, because if he's way overweight, there is extra pressure on his ligaments, there is extra pressure on his joints. We need to start slowly to build up his strength. Ride a lot of walk, but maybe stay away from very steep hills—at least stay away from going down, to begin with. If we have to go downhill, go very slowly, because when we go fast downhill we multiply the pressure on the front legs. Hill work can be a good workout, but we have to evaluate it.

Typically when horses get overweight, it's because they haven't been in training for a long time, so their muscles are not as strong as they should be. That lack of training has created a huge belly, and the back will have started to get a bit soft, almost like a pregnant mare's. The abdominal muscles, the core muscles, are weak, so there's no support for the back. The head starts to come up, and we see this old-horse syndrome, where the head is up and the back is down, almost a swayback. This is something we want to be careful about.

## RIDE FORWARD

When we are exercising this overweight horse, we want to keep in mind two things. Number One is that the horse is thinking forward. Protect that forwardness. Even though he is overweight, ride him a shorter time and a shorter distance to make sure he stays forward. Don't allow him to be lazy, don't allow him to not put effort into his steps.

This is very common. We feel sorry for him. We know it's hard for him to walk and we know he hasn't been ridden for a while. We're worried about his back and we're worried about his leg muscles. But we're not doing the horse any favors by letting him sleepwalk—walking with a lack of energy, a lack of forwardness, a lack of focus, just poking around. Why? He's not going to be burning as much fat when he's not putting any effort into his steps, so he's not going to be losing weight the way we want, and he's not going to be using his back muscles the way we want, which just makes the process longer. We're also getting the horse used to ignoring us and then we will have to fix that at some later time.

Riding at a walk—a forward, energetic walk—is a super good exercise for the overweight horse. It will help get the horse into shape. It will help the horse lose weight. And because there's not much pounding on the ground, we're not abusing the joints or the ligaments.

Keep him focused, keep him pushing forward, keep him extending, keep him energetic, keep him power-walking. If we have a hard time doing it, because the horse is so heavy and maybe lazy also, then expect a more forward and a more energetic walk for a shorter time, but maybe on more days of the week. I would rather go for a half an hour at a forward, energetic walk, than go for an hour at a slow, pokey walk. Rather than an hour at a pointless sleepwalk, I'd rather a half an hour when the horse is pushing off his hind end, working through his body, and using himself properly.

Walk is powerful. It's good exercise. It will get the horse into shape—but only if we ride it forward, with energy.

## MIND THE TOPLINE

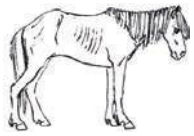
The second thing we need to keep in mind, after forwardness, is the topline. Protect the horse's topline. We're not doing the horse any favors by letting him stick his nose up in the air or hollow his back or be super strung out, totally on the forehand and down in the withers.

It might be limited what we can do about the horse's topline. If he is stiff and out of shape, it might be hard to do lateral work, so don't worry too much about that in the beginning. But try, as much as possible, to have a somewhat correct topline, one with some kind of convex bend, or at least one that's not ewe-necked. At the walk, try to encourage the horse to keep his neck rather low and round—not over-round, but just round enough. Even though it might not be perfect, we should do as much as we can to encourage the best topline possible. And as the horse begins to get into shape, we'll want to add in lateral work and gain more control over the topline.

To build up the back muscles, these

SCALE

## Body condition score



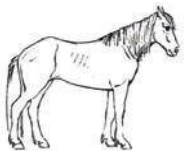
*Body condition 1,0*

**Very skinny**
Body condition 1

Not fit to be shown at a breeding show!

**Skinny**
Body condition 1,5

Not fit to be shown at a breeding show!

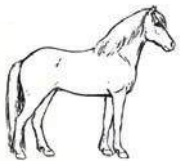


*Body condition 2,0*

**Thin**
Body condition 2,0

Not fit to be shown at a breeding show!

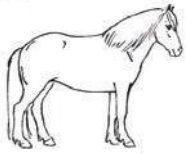
**Rather thin**
Body condition 2,5



*Body condition 3,0*

**Riding horse condition**
Body condition 3,0

**Slightly fat**
Body condition 3,5

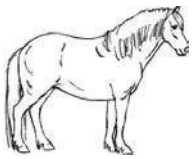


*Body condition 4,0*

**Fat**
Body condition 4,0

**Very fat**
Body condition 4,5

Not fit to be shown at a breeding show!



*Body condition 5,0*

**Obese**
**Body condition 5,0**

Not fit to be shown at a breeding show!

*Drawings by: Pétur Behrens*

The Body Condition Scoring System for Icelandic Horses, currently used by FEIF, was developed by Guðrún Stefánsdóttir, an associate professor at Hólar University, and Hólar professor Sigríður Björnsdóttir. Both specialize in equine exercise physiology and feeding and nutrition. Drawings by Petur Behrens.

are the two things that really matter: riding forward and in a proper topline. These are the main things that we can do to affect the horse's back and to build up his strength.

To sum up, training and feeding have to go together. If we continue to feed the horse too much, even if we then train quite a bit, it might not be enough. We have to adjust his feeding schedule to his training schedule.

Some ups and downs in weight are totally normal for a horse. It's normal that the horse gains a little weight in the summer, when we have a lot of green grass, and then in fall and winter we can control the feeding more and ideally get his weight in good balance. But it takes time, it takes patience, and it takes consistency.

### SOURCES

*Editor's note:* On his video channel in 2021, trainer Guðmar Pétursson was asked for some tips to help an overweight horse become fit again for riding. With his permission, we've edited his answer for print and included some details about the Body Condition Scoring System, which he provided to his subscribers as a PDF chart. The original video can be accessed (by subscription) on his Patreon page at https://www.patreon.com/gudmarpetursson.

All cartoons by Christina Romano.

# LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

**ANNE ELWELL'S LEGACY**

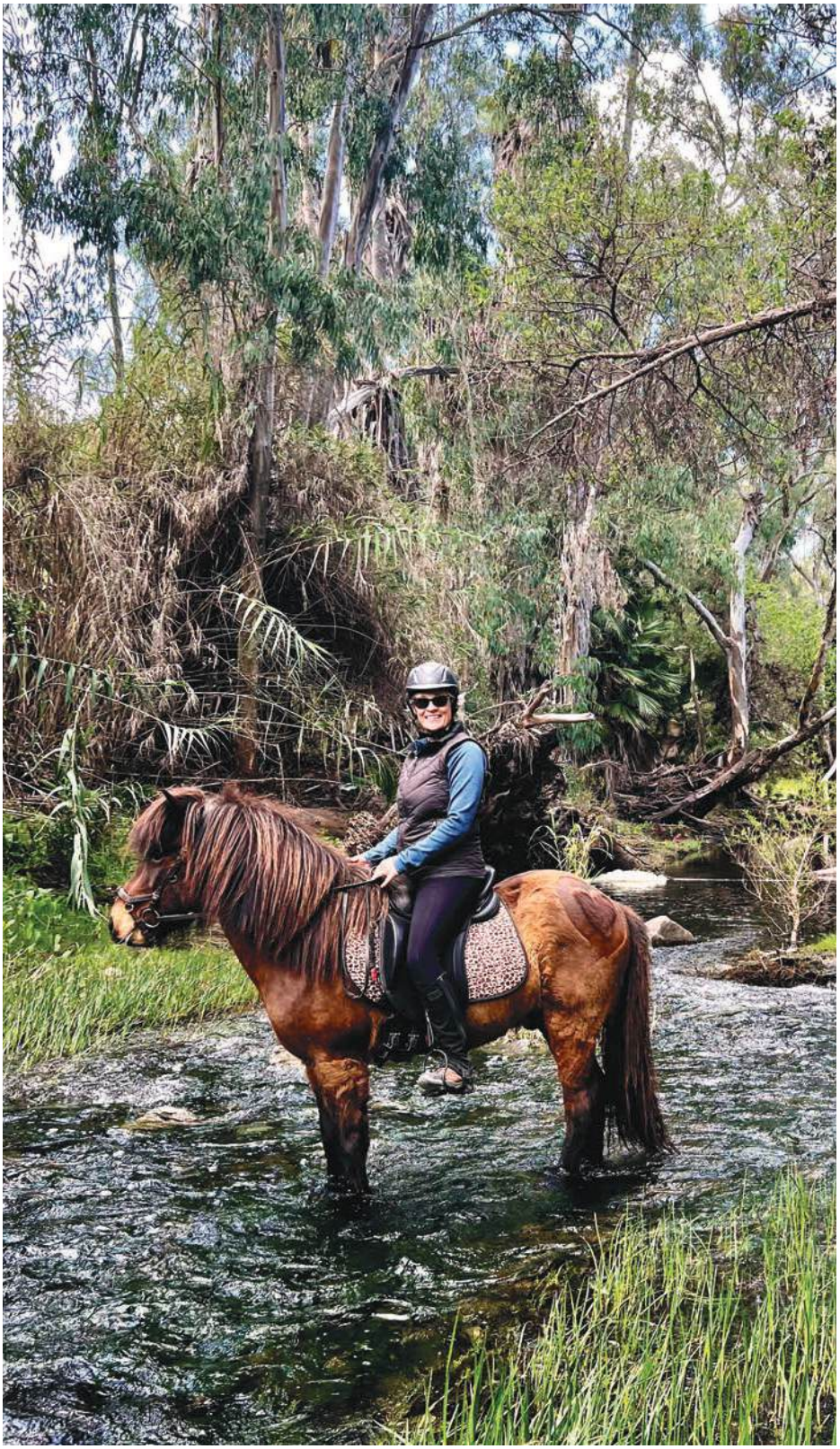
The article about former USIHC president—and founding *Quarterly* editor—Anne Elwell, in Issue Three 2024, brought back many memories. Anne was one of the first people I met when I decided to buy Icelandic horses in 1996, and she became a "character" in my book *A Good Horse Has No Color: Searching Iceland for the Perfect Horse*.

Here's how I described her: "A distinguished-looking woman in her fifties, Elwell walks with a slight limp from a fall on the ice some years ago. By profession she is a divorce lawyer. Her first words to me, responding to my letter asking for advice on buying Icelandics, were, What is your agenda? She often rides one of her three prize-winning stallions. Behind her glasses, her two eyes track on slightly different paths, making her face a challenge to read. She deliberates before she speaks, but once she gets going, she can be as brusque and opinionated as any Icelander."

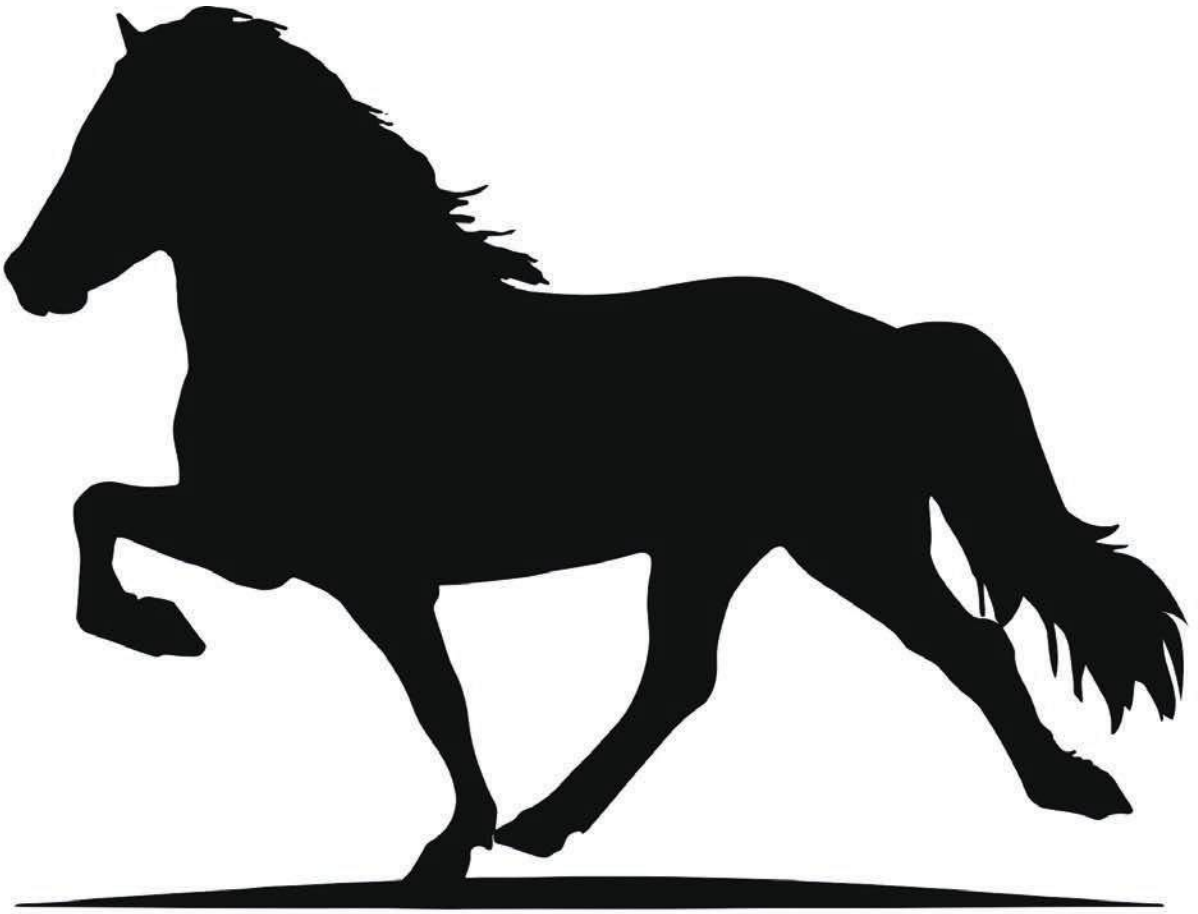
Re-reading what I wrote back then, I was struck by how much Anne influenced my Icelandic horse journey. Partly, it was a feeling of kinship. Like me, Anne saw the Icelandic horse in the context of Iceland's 1000-year-old culture. When I asked her why there were so few Icelandics in the US—at that time, about 2,000 compared to an estimated seven million total horses in the country—she answered, "It's difficult for people here to relate to the horses. The trouble is, people here don't have a sense of their culture. Horse psychics—people I otherwise raise my eyebrows at—say a lot of this stuff: 'This horse has a sense of its history, it's a part of its culture, its past.' And because Icelandic horses are culturally interesting," Elwell continued, "it's important to keep the culture in as you breed and raise them."

More importantly, Anne influenced my Icelandic horse journey because she was the one who had an agenda. By the end of the first day of our acquaintance, she had me volunteeering to help design the USIHC's first website. A few months later, I was helping out with the *Quarterly*. Twenty-five-plus years later, I still am. I'm grateful to her for getting me involved in the USIHC and for helping me meet so many wonderful people and horses along the way.

*—Nancy Marie Brown, Vermont*



Sabrina Drake and Örn frá Tjarnastöðum, a son of the famous stallion Spuni frá Vesturkoti, on the trail at Spooks Canyon creek in Olivehain, CA. Sabrina writes, "I wanted to submit this photo to the Quarterly, it was such a special moment! I loved the last magazine. I love them all. Happy Tölt Trails!" Send your special moments to us at quarterly@icelandics.org.



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More Information:

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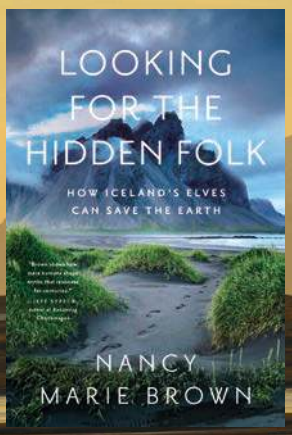

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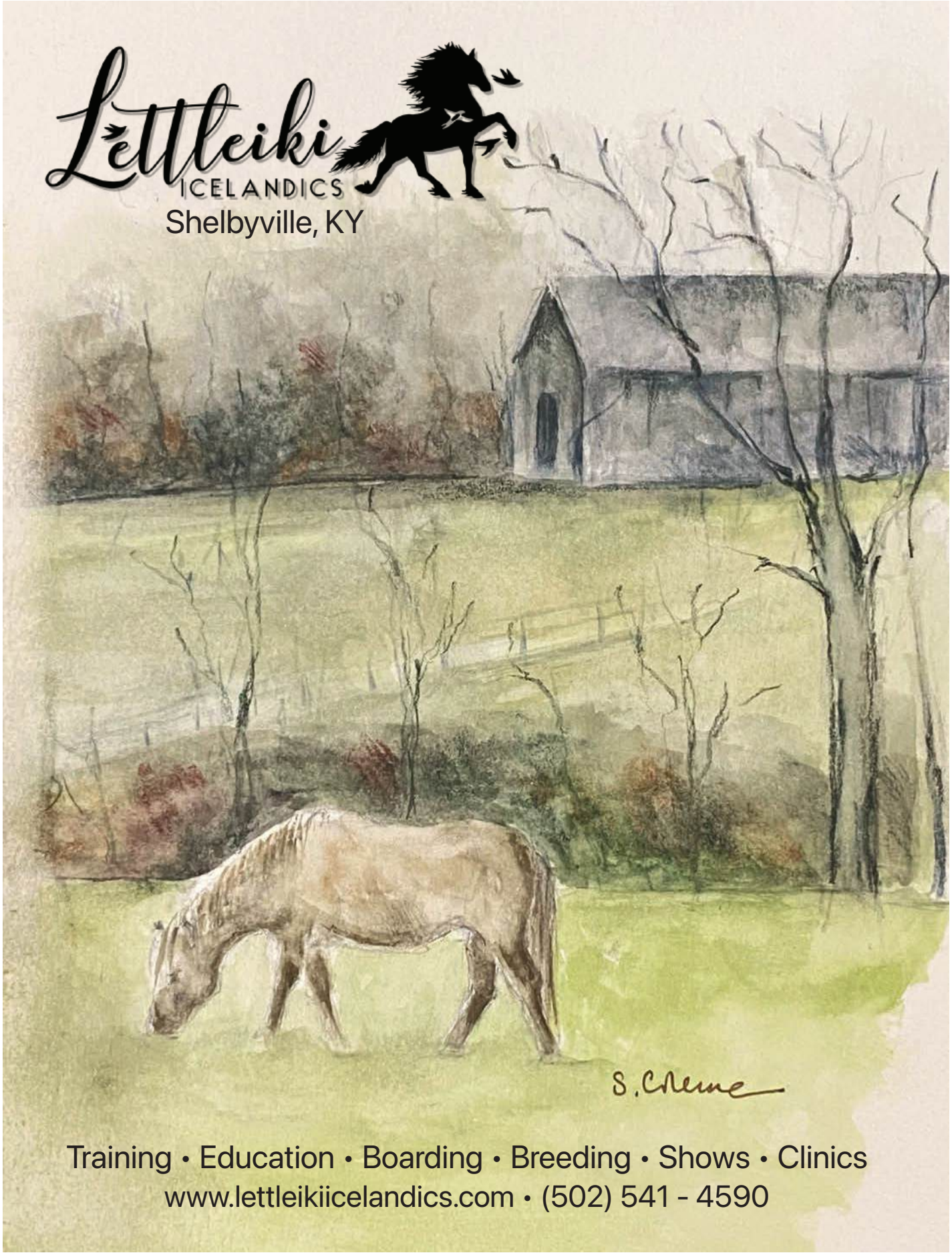
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