

**W.Robert Cook F.R.C.V.S., PhD.,
Professor of Surgery Emeritus, Tufts University, School
of Veterinary Medicine**

206, Birch Run Road, Chestertown, MD 21620

Telephone (410) 778 9005 E-mail: drwrcook@aol.com

4/20/02

The Editor, Trail Blazer
4241 N.Covina Circle
Prescott Valley, AZ 86314

Dear Editor,

LEAVE NOTHING BUT FOOTPRINTS ... AND FERTILIZER

The phrase "Riding rough shod" was originally a farrier's description of a method of shoeing in which the nail heads were deliberately left projecting, to try and prevent a horse from slipping. But the phrase has entered the language as a metaphor to mean, "Treating one without the least consideration." I mention this because the metaphor might now represent what some members of the public feel about riders.

Trail riders might strengthen their case for maintaining their right of access to public lands if they could show that horses are beneficial to such lands rather than harmful. Trail rider's horses have been accused of many things and most of the charges can be refuted. It might be difficult, however, to refute the charge that trail horses cause soil erosion. Every farmer knows that even one horse and rider can divide the sod and disperse the topsoil when all four hooves are shod

with iron 'pastry-cutters.' It is no surprise that horse trails tend to be rocky.

But if a trail horse is barefoot its impact is beneficial. A barefoot horse will leave blameless footprints and, in passing by, will enrich the land. Furthermore, barefoot horses live longer, healthier and relatively lame-free lives. Riders of barefoot horses enjoy the pleasure of discovering that not only has their horse's welfare been improved but so also has its performance.

The irrefutable reasons, both physiological and practical, for not nailing iron cramps on the elastic toes of our horses are available in many books (see partial listing below) and on many websites. These include but are not limited to www.hufklinik.de, www.thehorseshoof.com, <http://members.screenz.com/gretchenfathauer>, www.ibem.org.uk, and www.unitedhorsemanship.com. Dr. Hiltrud Strasser, the foremost pioneer in the barefoot movement, will soon have her second website available at www.strasserhoofcare.com. Those trail riders who are currently of the opinion that their own horse's hooves could not possibly withstand the wear and tear of the rocky terrain over which they work will learn that, given time and correct management, they can.

Trail riders have both the need and the opportunity to lead by example. They could show the world that horses can be liberated from this ill-conceived invention of the Middle Ages. Horseshoes are unlucky for horses.

Sincerely,

Robert Cook

Bibliography

Strasser, H and Kells, S.: *“A Lifetime of Soundness: The Keys to Optimal Horse Health, Lameness Rehabilitation, and the High-Performance Barefoot Horse.”* Third edition (revised). Sabine Kells, Qualicum Beach, BC V9K 1S7, Canada, 1998

Strasser, H.: *“Shoeing: A Necessary Evil?”* Edited & translated by Sabine Kells. Sabine Kells, Qualicum Beach, BC V9K 1S7, Canada, 2000

Strasser, H and Kells, S.: *“The Hoofcare Specialist’s Handbook: Hoof Orthopedics and Holistic Lameness Rehabilitation”* Sabine Kells, PO Box 44, Qualicum Beach, BC V9K 1S7, Canada, 2001.