

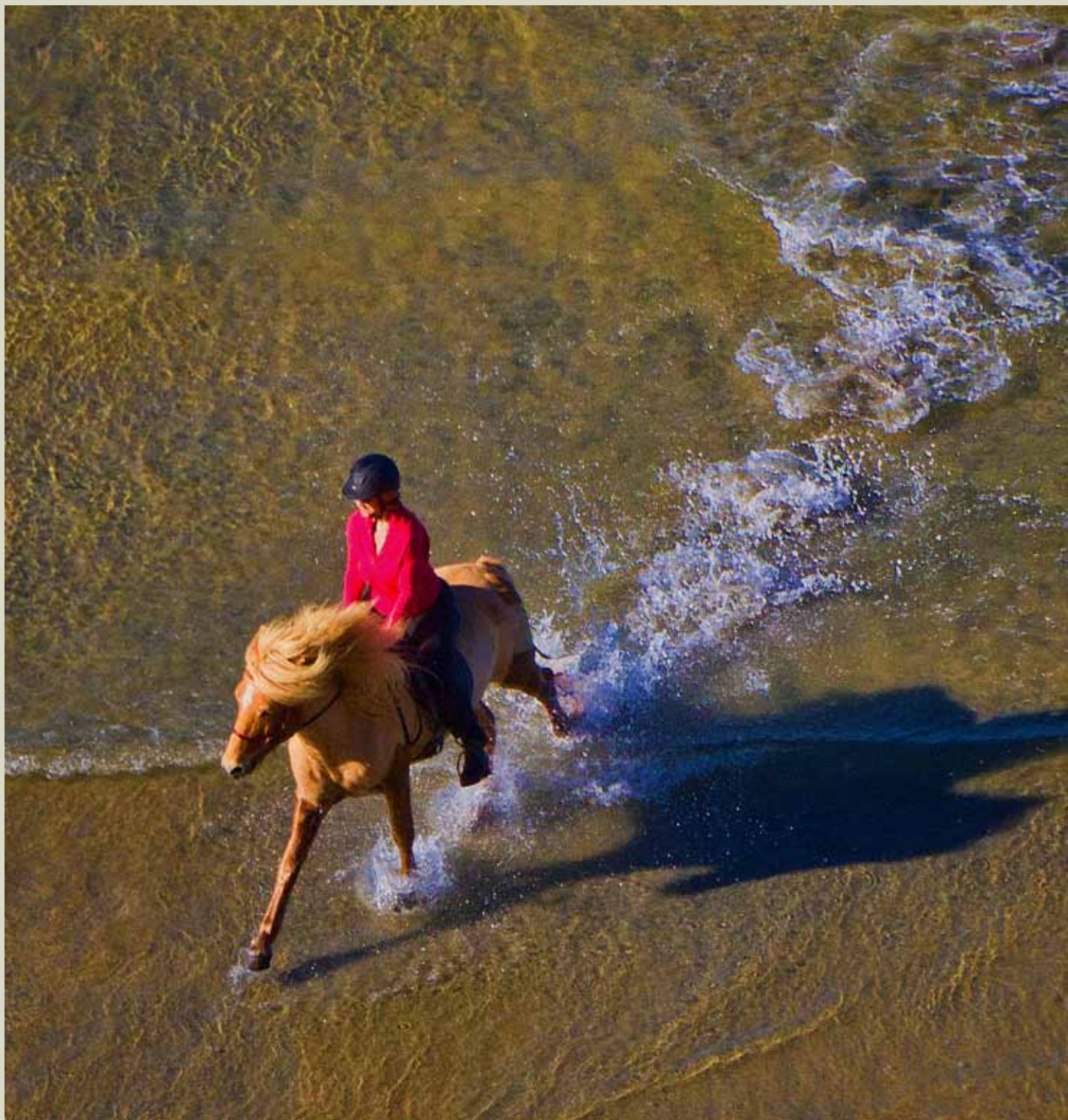
ISSUE THREE

THE

2011

# ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y



**Official Publication of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress**  
Member Association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations)

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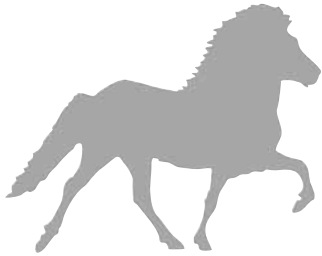
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THE  
ICELANDIC  
HORSE  
QUARTERLY  
Issue Three 2011

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

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# ICELANDIC HORSE

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**On the cover:** Kimberly Hart on Hroar fra Ragnheidarstodum riding on the beach in Delmar, CA.  
Photo by Elisabeth Haug.



## FEIF AND THE USIHC

FEIF is the international association dedicated to the protection and promotion of Icelandic horses. Comprised of the National Breed Associations of 17 European countries (including Iceland), Canada, and the United States, it governs competition activities and regulates the breeding and registration of Icelandic horses throughout the world outside of Iceland. See [www.feif.org](http://www.feif.org) for more information.

The United States Icelandic Horse Congress 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. As a FEIF member organization, the Congress maintains the Registry of Icelandic Horses in the United States, sponsors U.S. participation in international competition, and regulates breeding and competition activities in the United States in accordance with FEIF rules. USIHC also sponsors activities, events, and educational programs in the United States which are beneficial to the overall interests of the breed. Yearly membership is \$45 (\$35 for youth members); family membership, \$65; foreign friends, \$70. For more information, see the Congress website at [www.icelandics.org/join](http://www.icelandics.org/join).

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The Congress maintains the Registry of Icelandic Horses in the United States in accordance with FEIF rules. The Registry Rules and all forms needed to register an Icelandic Horse in the United States are available on the Congress website at [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org). Contact Ásta Covert: P.O. Box 1724, Santa Ynez, CA 93460; 805-688-1393; [registry@icelandics.org](mailto:registry@icelandics.org)

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Asta Dogg Bjarnadottir-Covert and Dynjandi fra Dalvik represented the U.S. at the 2011 FEIF World Championships in Austria, August 1-7. This photo is from the 2009 competition, where the pair won silver in the Four Gait. Photo by Mark Johnson.

## WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 2011 FEIF World Championships were held August 1-7 in Austria, with more than 200 contestants from 19 countries. The U.S. team was selected by tryouts held at four locations and by video on May 22-29; the judge was Thorgeir Gudlaugsson of Iceland. Scores are posted on the USIHC website, [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org), under "Ride." Seventeen riders tried out—with eight competing for scores only. Seven horse-and-rider pairs were chosen to represent the United States in Austria, with four agreeing to attend: Asta Dogg Bjarnadottir-Covert and Dynjandi fra Dalvik (with a high score of 7.80), Anne Marie Martin and Huni fra Torfunesi (7.40), Rachel Ng and Kaliber fra Laekjarbotnum (6.50), and Chrissy Siepolt and Dreki wom Wotnshof (6.30). Three other riders qualified for the team

but elected not to travel to Austria with the team: Gudmar Petursson and Kvedja fra Stekkjardal (6.80), Shannon Hughes and Lipurta from Mill Farm (7.00), and Sigrun Brynjarsdottir and Parker fra Solheimum (6.50). Congratulations to all the riders who qualified. The *Quarterly* will report on the championships in our next issue.

## PLEASURE RIDER RESULTS

The Pleasure Rider Program scoreboard has been updated to reflect the mid-year results. This year's results-to-date, as well as the final results from past years are all on the USIHC website under "Ride."

## SANCTIONED SHOWS

Scores from the 2011 Summermot held May 29-30 at Winterhorse Park in Eagle, WI, and from the Silver Maple Summer Show held June 18-19 in Tunbridge, VT, are now posted on the USIHC website under "Ride." The judges were Elisabeth Jansen in Wisconsin and Hulda Geirsdottir in Vermont. High scorers at the Summermot were Gudmar Petursson riding Kvedja fra Stekkjardal (6.83 in Tolt T1 A-Final) and Carrie Lyons-Brant riding Glaeta fra Brekku (6.80 in Four Gait V1 A-Final). At the Silver Maple Show, high

scorers were Shannon Hughes riding Lipurta from Mill Farm (7.17 in Tolt T1 A-Final) and Jana Meyer riding Thor fra Skorrastad 4 (6.17 in Tolt T3 A-Final).

## SHOW RULES UPDATED

The rules for USIHC-sanctioned shows have been modified to allow for two- and three-day World Ranking competitions. Under the new rules, a show organizer may offer two or three World Ranking shows on consecutive days. These must be FEIF World Ranking shows to qualify for the new format. Contact Will Covert ([sport@icelandics.org](mailto:sport@icelandics.org)) for more information. The changes took effect in June.

## YOUTH CUP TRYOUTS OPEN

All riders regardless of age may submit "scores-only" videos for comments from the Youth Cup Tryout judge. The Youth Cup Tryouts will be a National Ranking event for the first time. This offers all riders regardless of age a chance to get more scores into the National Ranking system. The Youth Committee has prepared a detailed introduction to the 2012 FEIF Youth Cup. See <http://www.icelandics.org/youth/youthcup2012.php>. The Committee wants all riders—young and old—to have ample time to prepare.



Rachel Ng and Kaliber fra Laekjarbotnum competed for the U.S. team at the World Championships in Austria; Rachel is the number-one ranked youth rider in the USIHC. Here they are shown at the CIA Open last spring. Photo by Ryan Ng.

If you are a young rider, between 14 and 17 at any time in 2012, and are interested in competing at the Youth Cup or you are an adult interested in helping as the Team or Country Leader, please read this information.

## BOARD MEETINGS

The USIHC Board of Directors met on May 10, June 8, and July 12. Minutes of the meetings can be found on the USIHC website, [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org), under "The Congress."

The Pleasure Riding committee announced a new sponsor: Tolt Tack replaces *Tolt News* as the prize for the 2,500-hour riders. Tolt Tack has also generously offered prizes for the top three All-Star riders.

At the request of the Sport Committee, the Board approved the Code of Conduct Agreements for the World Championships Team and Team Leader. The Sport Committee also shared a letter from the Canadian Icelandic Horse Federation concerning its judge training program. After some discussion, the committee decided that there is no need to change the current process for the recognition of intern judges trained outside the U.S. The demand is so low that asking a foreign-trained individual to submit a letter briefly describing the individual's training and



Silver Maple Icelandic Horse Farm in Tunbridge, VT, held a USIHC-sanctioned show June 18-19 with over 40 horse and rider combinations. Here, host Susan Peters competes in the Tolt T-1 preliminaries on Glaumur fra Vallanesi. Photo by Nancy Marie Brown.

experience to the Sport Leader seems to work just fine.

The Youth Committee announced that Alea Robinson of Alaska applied to attend the Youth Camp in Scotland. The Board approved a request from the committee that the Country Leader and Team Leader selected by the Youth Committee

for the FEIF 2012 Youth Cup each receive support for travel expenses of \$1000 each. This expense had been approved for the 2010 Youth Cup and helped in the recruitment process. The Board unanimously approved the request for the 2012 Youth Cup. The Board also approved the revised Youth Cup 2012 Tryout Rules and Applications, with some modifications. The final documents are now posted on the USIHC website (see above). Finally, Sam Castleman stepped down as chair of the Youth Committee in May. Laurie Prestine agreed to be a co-chair; until another co-chair can be found, Sam will fill the position.

The Regional Clubs committee is looking for a new chair, Lori having stepped down for personal reasons in July.

The USIHC Secretary, Doug Smith, suggested that we consider alternative membership options to avoid having to chase renewals each year. Two possible options include a lifetime membership and a subscription-style membership. In the case of the latter, the USIHC could possibly use PayPal to automatically renew memberships annually based on the sign-up date. No decisions were made.



In one of the fun events at the Silver Maple Summer Show, held in Tunbridge, VT, Richard Davis, riding Gledi fra Gili, and Marilyn Blaess, riding Vangskjona from Green Mountain Icelandic Horse Farm, compete in the Ribbon Tolt. Photo by Nancy Marie Brown.



## WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 2011 FEIF World Championships were held August 1-7 at Islandpferde Reithof Piber, in St. Radegund, Austria. The results are posted in the FEIF WorldRanking, along with the lists of participating teams, on [www.feif.org](http://www.feif.org). News can be found at [www.islandpferde-wm.at](http://www.islandpferde-wm.at). The Quarterly will report on the event in our next issue.

## YOUTH CAMP

The FEIF YouthCamp 2011 was hosted by the Icelandic Horse Society of Great Britain (IHSGB) at Broomlee Outdoor Centre in West Linton, Scotland on July 23-30, 2011. The FEIF YouthCamp has its own website: <http://feifyouthcamp2011.ihsgb.co.uk/>. For further information, contact the USIHC Youth Committee.

## YOUTH TREKKING

Due to the very small number of applications, the FEIF Horse Trekking Tour 2011 was postponed until 2012. As soon as the new date is fixed it will be announced on the FEIF website. The 2011 tour was scheduled to take place in the south-east part of Sweden (about 30 km from Kristianstad). The tour was for pleasure riders, aged 12-20, with their own or rented horses. Daily rides would cover 15-30 kilometres. The participants would sleep out in nature and be responsible for helping out with cooking and taking care of the horses. If you are interested in the 2012 tour, please contact the USIHC Youth Committee.

## JUDGES' TEST

The FEIF sport judges' test, to become a FEIF Licensed Sport Judge or National Sport Judge, will be held October 7-9, 2011, at Islandpferdehof Piet Hoyos in Semriach, Austria, near Graz. The test is connected to the Steierische Landesmeisterschaften. Every FEIF member country is entitled to enter any number of candidates for the test for FEIF International Sport Judges. At the same time, it is also possible to enter candidates for the test to become a National Sport Judge. Please register via your country.



The Austrian rider Catherine Gratzl (left) established a new World Record in Pace Race 150m - P3 riding the 11-year-old mare Blökk frá Kambi [IS2000287461]. Their time was 13.47". The record was set on the World Championships 2011 grounds in St. Radegund, Austria and was been recognised by FEIF. Photo by Peter Niess.

## EDUCATION SEMINAR

The FEIF Education Seminar 2011 (after the cancellation of the Hólar Seminar in August) will be held in conjunction with an open Equine Seminar in the Netherlands during the last week of October. The theme of the ISES 2011 conference is "Equitation Science, Principles and Practice." On Oct. 25, Dr. Hilary Clayton will give an evening lecture on understanding equine locomotion biomechanics, particularly in relation to gaits, with a special focus on tolt and the features that distinguish it from other gaits. Oct. 26 is the popular Equitation Science Day. The ISES conference itself starts on Oct. 27.

## JUDGES' GUIDELINES

The latest version of the Sport Judges' Guidelines (2011) was published in April. The major changes are improved guidelines for judging pace on the oval track and more consequent punishment of rough or bad riding. The guidelines are not only instructive for judges: they contain relevant information for riders, trainers, and instructors as well.

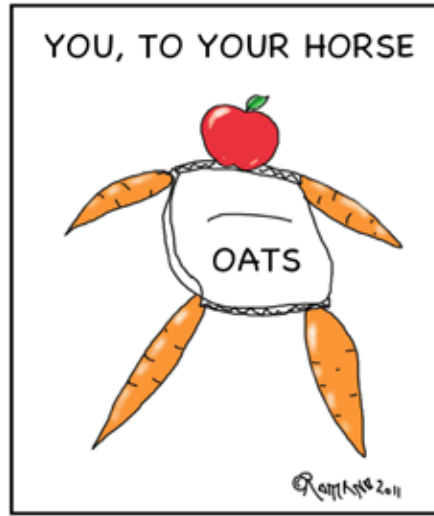
The FEIF Sport Judges adapted the guidelines for judging pace on the oval track during their recent seminar in St.

Radegund, Austria. The main purpose of the changes in the pace guidelines are:

1. To put more emphasis on the quality of the transitions. Judges shouldn't forget to look at how the transitions are made because they are concentrating on looking at exactly where they are made or are even busy with calculating the deduction for the wrong spot in their minds.
2. Make more difference between a full long side of pace and a half long side. Maximum is now 2.0, but used to be 3.5.
3. Be harder on rough riding. If there is a yellow card for any of the attempts, the final marks can never be higher than 3.5, regardless of how good the other attempts were.
4. Make the scoring system easier for the judges to use. Fewer fixed deductions equals fewer calculations and less bookkeeping.

## JUDGING SEMINAR

Forty-three International Sport Judges from 10 countries took part in a very successful seminar in St. Radegund, Austria on April 8-9. St. Radegund is the venue for the 2011 World Championships. A major part of the time was used for practical judging of the basic gaits (pace on the pace track and on the oval track, walk, trot, tolt, and canter).



Thorgeir Gudlaugsson and Bent Rune Skulvold prepared a presentation (with discussion) about good, bad, and ugly riding. The judges also discussed other ways to validate their licenses. On Sunday the 15 World Championships judges met with chief judge Einar Ragnasson and deputy chief judge Eva Petersen to start their preparations for the World Championships.

## BREEDING SEMINAR

Twenty-five professional riders aged 20 to 26 met at Skeidvellir near Hella, Iceland, from March 31 to April 3. Every country could send up to three participants, and 12 countries followed the invitation of the FEIF Breeding Department. The idea of the seminar was to offer instruction and exchange of experiences for the future top breeding-horse trainers, in order to increase the number of breeding assessments and their quality. The famous horse farm and training stable of Siggí Saem and his family at Skeidvellir was a perfect location for the practical and theoretical work on the question, "How can we optimize the presentation of a breeding horse?" Lectures, presentations and riding, video analysis, and discussion combined for a tight schedule. A dinner with top trainers, a visit to the Ice Tolt in Reykjavik and disco time in Selfoss completed the program. This event will hopefully be the start for similar activities offered to breeders and breeding horse trainers both at national and international level.

## TACK QUESTIONS

Sometimes equipment used in sport riding doesn't fit either the description of what is allowed or what is not allowed. In such cases the description of what is allowed prevails. Equipment not described as allowed is not allowed. At the moment there are four items that might cause confusion:

1. The use of rubber bands in manes. It is not allowed to change the natural shape of the horse with artefacts and specific techniques. However it is allowed to use rubber bands only to divide the mane of a horse evenly when the (heavy) mane is otherwise unbalanced and would hinder the performance of the horse.
2. Clipping and shaving. These are allowed when needed for the health of a horse.
3. Snow grips. In winter time the use of snow grips (rings/soles with extra grip on the ground, to be used on slippery surfaces) are allowed for safety reasons, in addition to nails and studs as described in FIPO 2.3.4. The ring/sole itself should fit otherwise in the description of FIPO 2.3.7.
4. Filling material in the hoof (like that produced by Vettec). FIPO describes filling material in combination with a sole. In such cases the filling material is only allowed between the sole and the hoof, not below the sole (between the

sole and the ground). However the use of a sole is not always needed. In such cases the filling material may extend the imaginary line between hoof and shoe. This is accepted on a temporary basis (in 2011), as the FEIF Sport Committee plans to discuss it further in its meeting of October 2011 in relation to our policy to reduce the weight per foot.

## HORSES IN EUROPE

The European Horse Network (EHN) published a leaflet about Horses in Europe. The aim of EHN is to promote the development of the horse sector in Europe and to act as a platform for the horse industry in relation to European institutions and media. The leaflet can be downloaded at [http://www.feiffengur.com/documents/ehn\\_leaflet\\_lr.pdf](http://www.feiffengur.com/documents/ehn_leaflet_lr.pdf) and distributed freely. FEIF is one of the founding members of EHN.



# REGIONAL UPDATES

## ALASKA

*Jeanette Willis writes:* The members of the Alaska Icelandic Horse Association are separated by many miles. In spite of the five- to seven-hour drive they arrange to come together a few times during the long summer days. June 25-26 was one of those times. We met at Arctic Arrow Farm, about midway between our distant members, for a riding clinic with two talented instructors. Alex Pregitzer, who used an oval training area and concentrated on specific gaits, especially tolt, and Bill Burke, whose emphasis was on equitation: basic riding skills, seat, and aids. Ten riders, the clinic's limit, learned many ways to improve their riding and enjoyment with their horse.

The format of the clinic was adapted from a riding clinic by Gerd Heuschmann that Bill Burke and Bernie Willis attended in November 1999. One of the drawbacks of group riding is that it is very difficult for the trainer to address individual needs. Heuschmann solves this problem with many individual lessons. All participants get individual time, as well as the opportunity to observe and ask questions throughout the day. Our clinic day is divided up into two parts, then subdivided into 20-minute sections. At the beginning of the clinic, each rider signs up for one 20-minute session, morning and afternoon. The rider is responsible for warming up and cooling down their horses



This summer, Alys Culhane and Pete Praetorius of Alaska traveled by horseback from southern to northern Colorado. They primarily rode their two Icelandic horses, Raudhetta and Sigg, and used Signy as their pack horse. Signy was on loan from Andrea Brodie, who owns Lough Arrow Icelandics in Aguilar, CO. According to Alys, the trek was challenging, in part because it had been a heavy snow year, and the passes were still covered with snow. All are on their way back to Alaska, but are planning next summer to continue the long ride. Wyoming and Montana are next.

outside of the 20-minute lesson. Last year, when we first tried the format, the riders were not sure they wanted to ride only 20 minutes; however, after trying the system all agreed they worked hard for the 20 minutes and it was plenty long. Since the

June clinic was our second this season, with horses in better condition, we increased the riding time. Each rider had two 20-minute sessions (one with each instructor) morning and afternoon. This instruction format requires careful time keeping. A large clock outside the tack room door helped.

In the past the AIHA has annually hosted many highly qualified clinicians. Each one has brought new insight to the art of riding. But our progress as riders has been slow and inconsistent. Last year we decided to have the same basic instructor three times each summer. Now we see consistency and progress.

Participants came to the clinic from as far south as Homer and Fairbanks/North Pole in the north. A number of the riders camped on the pasture alongside of the grassy runway at the farm with their horses and trailers. Buffet-style meals were included in the clinic fees. The lakeside cabin was the site of preparation and dining.

Our final count shows the June riding clinic was full with 10 riders, 7 auditors, 17 guests, and 15 horses.



In June, the Alaska Icelandic Horse Association sponsored a clinic in Wasilla, AK with basic equitation instructor Bill Burke and Icelandic instructor Alex Pregitzer. Here, Alex coaches Nilla Ekstrom riding Rjupa. Photo by Robin Marquiss.



The Cascade Club sponsored a conformation clinic with Barbara Frische and Svanny Stefansdottir in the spring. Here Barbara gets to know a young horse. Photo by Karen Brotzman.

## CASCADE CLUB

*Karen Brotzman writes:* We started this quarter with a conformation clinic with Barbara Frische and Svanny Stefansdottir in Battle Ground, WA. This two-day event helped us all understand how a horse's conformation could relate to abilities under saddle (and much more). Many members attended and we all learned a lot. We all had the opportunity to score a few horses ourselves and learned from that experience as well. There is always something new to see and

learn. (And, a few surprises as well...) Svanny rode many of the horses for the "under saddle" portion of the clinic and Barbara talked us all through what we were seeing. It was a very successful clinic and we hope to see more of the same.

Another big event was the club play day at The Dalles Riders Arena and club house. Sixteen members made their way east to enjoy a fantastic facility, intricate trail course, and large arena (with decent footing for the horses). And, of course, lots

and lots of great food! The trail course, just off the main arena, had many interesting obstacles: the common mail box and gate opening, a water crossing, a huge rope "go-through" game (the height of the wooden frame and diameter of the rope were large enough to give a pretty good slap when they bounced back on the rider or horse). Additionally, the course had many different trail obstacles, like tight turns and logs. It was one of the best of such tests I've seen.

Our second Board meeting of the year was July 10, where we discussed a proposal for by-law changes and the upcoming bi-annual member meeting, to be held August 27 at Red Feather Ranch. We are looking forward to the meeting and a weekend of camping in the shadow of Mount Adams. A trail ride and campfire dinner are included in the plans.

But first we will enjoy a clinic with trainer Ann Kloth and a backcountry campout at Kalama Horse Camp on Mount St. Helens. We are all so happy winter is finally over and we can get some horse time and sunshine into our lives!

## NEIHC

*Amy Goddard writes:* Despite a long winter and a late, wet spring, there have been many events happening all over the northeast! The annual Bunny Hop ride was held in North Tarrytown, NY on April 17. Nicki Esdorn writes: "A group of ten enthusiastic



Yes, the ears were worn throughout the NEIHC's spirited Bunny Hop ride this spring. From left to right: Heidi on Freyr, Jacki on Flugar, Caroll on Topas, Arsenio on Odur, Nicki on Haukur Freyr, Martina on Stigandi, Pam on Phileus, Brigit on Draumur, Karen on Glanni, and Martha on Kentucky Mountain Horse, Lilybean. Photo by Steven Cawman.





Karen McDonald aboard Haki from Helms Hill. The pair won first place in the Pleasure division in an ACTHA ride. Photo by Michael Hall.

Easter Bunnies delighted walkers and dogs alike at Rockefeller State Park on a sunny April day. All riders—and one horse—wore bunny ears throughout the entire ride!”

April and May events included clinics and schooling shows at Solheimar Farm, VT and Thor Icelandics, NY. World Championship tryouts were held at Mill Farm, NY and Silver Maple Farm, VT. Both Sig-rún Brynjarsdóttir and Shannon Hughes qualified for the U.S. Team.

On May 21, Karen McDonald, riding Haki from Helms Hill, won first place in the Pleasure division in an ACTHA ride at Bear Spring Mountain Park in Walton, NY. Amy Goddard won 3rd aboard Randver frá Leysingjastöðum. Competing against 25 horse and rider teams, the Icelandics did very well. Karen writes: “It’s quite something for us to win anything at all. Haki really has taken to these trail rides. He’s such a sweet boy and my pal and we’ve weathered a few storms over the years.”

In June, Steinar Sigurbjornsson taught a sold-out clinic at Thor Icelandics, and Susan Peters hosted a sanctioned show

at Silver Maple Farm. Susan writes: “A big thank you to everyone who attended, rode, helped and generally had fun at the show. I know that I had a blast and judging from the e-mails, so did a lot of folks who participated. Everyone thought that the judge was tough but very good. Hulda Geirsdóttir was quite strict in her scoring, but I believe that the riders all felt that this gave real meaning to the scores. She was friendly and helpful. The midnight tolt (actually at 9:30 p.m.) was a huge blast. Riders dressed their horses with light sticks such that the only thing you could see was the shape of the lights. So imagine you are in the dark, and all you can see are strangely lit shapes gliding through the air. We posted a video on Facebook. After the tolt we danced the night away, still wearing our light sticks. My personal favorite was the partner tolt where riders were judged individually in tolt and then again as partners. It was remarkable how the horses tried to synchronize their movements to each other. Our teddy bear class for our youngest riders charmed the judge so much she had to take photos. We also

benefitted from generous sponsors! Thank you to one and all.”

Jenny Tuthill adds: “I had the amusing experience of taking my two horses to the Silver Maple show. We had great weather, a nice turnout, and a good supportive ‘vibe’ amongst those attending. However, my two herd-bound horses were distinctly out of sorts; every time I removed one from their paddock for riding, grooming, etc., they were so distracted with their constant need to call one another that concentration on the task at hand was practically impossible! Gaits went askew in all classes, as the two horses screamed to one another. Lesson learned? Separate them more frequently, prepare more intently, and only take one of them to a show at a time.”

Jenny also took part, along with approximately 13 other Icelandics and one Percheron, in a trail ride at Mount Tom, in Woodstock, VT on June 25. “We all had a fabulous two-hour ride, organized by Susan Peters and Jana Meyer. Jana did a lovely job of keeping everyone together and safe as we tolted, cantered, and trotted on the fabulous trails. I think everyone



Susan Peters, host of the Silver Maple Summer Show, enters the track for the Tolt T2 preliminaries on Aska frá Geldingaa. Photo by Nancy Marie Brown.





St. Skutla club members Kestrel Wilder riding Kraftur fra Hrolfsstodum and Andrea Barber riding Hrokur fra Hlemmiskeidi 1A. Photo by Steven Barber.

who participated looks forward to a repeat ride! We all appreciated the fact that there was finally some sunshine after many days of rain and overcast skies.”

Several members are training and riding their young horses, such as Betty Grindrod and Perla, Lisa Mackey and Embla, Martina Gates and Revia, Karen McDonald and Miska, and Amy Goddard and Baldur. In addition, for those of you wondering, “whatever happened to the raffle horse?” Prinsessa is doing very well and in training with her proud owner, Brigit Huwyler.

Kara Noble writes: “I am delighted to say that I’m a new member with a wonderful new horse, my very first Icelandic, the 12-year-old mare Kolbrá frá Brávöllum. She officially became mine on April 30, and I bought her from fellow NEIHC member (and club treasurer) Esther Heffernan. She is proving to be a wonderful ambassador for the breed when I take her to clinics (we did a groundwork clinic with Centered Riding Instructor Heidi Potter just a week after I got her) or out to ride. In most cases, she is the first Icelandic horse that most people have met “in person,” and everyone who sees her is amazed by her combination of level-headed willingness,

her big heart, and her powerful body and spirit. At first, my barn owner was afraid the big Quarterhorses and Thoroughbreds would bully her, but she very quickly demonstrated that she could take care of herself. (As we integrated her into the herd, her nickname switched quickly from “Cutie Pie” to “Viking Warrior Princess.”) Several people who mocked me for wanting a pony have now told me they can’t believe what a great horse she is. The first few months of this year have also been a whirlwind of getting to know people via the NEIHC. I’m so glad that I have joined and met so many terrific people and their horses!”

As of this writing, several of us are about to attend a three-day clinic, July 8–10 with Steinar Sigurbjornsson at Heleen Heyning’s West Wind Farm in Delhi, NY. We also look forward to the following events throughout the rest of the summer and early fall:

July 29: Clinic with Steinar Sigurbjornsson and Kristjan Kristjansson, Thor Icelandics

July 30–31: Schooling Show, Thor Icelandics

Aug. 13–14: Educational Clinic and Young Horse Evaluation with Barbara Frische and Kristjan Kristjansson, Thor Icelandics

Aug. 26–28: three-day clinic with Steinar Sigurbjornsson and Kristjan Kristjansson, Thor Icelandics

Sept. 15–17: NEIHC FEIF Breed Evaluations, Schoharie County Sunshine Fairgrounds, Cobleskill, NY

Sept. 30–Oct. 2: Pace clinic, Thor Icelandics

NEIHC members are encouraged to check the NEIHC Yahoo mail group, our website, [neihc.com](http://neihc.com) and our Facebook page for news and info on upcoming events. Or contact club president, Brian Puntin by phone: 413-528-3003 or e-mail: [bpuntin@bcn.net](mailto:bpuntin@bcn.net).



Jonathan Stafslieen riding Hroar fra Ragnheiðarstodum on a group trail ride in Rancho Santa Fe, CA. Photo by Elisabeth Haug.

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## ST SKUTLA CLUB

*Andrea Barber writes:* It's hard to believe, but already it's July and members of the Saint Skutla Icelandic Horse Club haven't had one group event yet this year. But that isn't to say that members have not been active. It's just that most have been doing their own thing and are too busy to even report what they are up to!

Club member Shari Shapleigh recently visited Norway while accompanying her husband on a business trip. There she was able to visit Mesna Icelandic Horse Training Center near Lillehammer (<http://www.mesna-islandshest.no/>) and participate in their annual "speed ride" around Mesna Lake and the mountains. Shari said the landscape was severe and the horses hot. "They thought nothing of riding the horses constantly hard through armpit deep mud, rocky terrain (I'm talking ankle-twisting terrain), and steep inclines. Five riders fell during the ride. (Luckily I did not!) By the third day I guess I passed their test (or they wanted to test me further), as they gave me the hottest horse at the farm—who was barely trained. Very difficult to maneuver in the forests. Quite the adventure! Owners of the farm and other riders on the ride were surprised to learn that there were any Icelandic horses in the U.S., much less that they were of good quality and had traditional Icelandic names."

Club members Steve and Andrea Barber, both back in graduate school, have been enjoying as much riding as their busy schedules permit. They also welcomed some new horses to their Sand Meadow Farm: two new foals, some new geldings (Kraftur fra Hrolfsstodum and Kvistur from Blasted Rock) and a new stallion (Hrokur fra Hlemmiskeidi 1A). Hrokur, who had not been with other Icelandic horses in several years, is happy to be back with an Icelandic herd. He is also enjoying being ridden out on trails where his easy-going, unflappable character and exceptional tolt make him a popular mount. The foals are both fillies born one week apart. One is a very elegant black filly by Kalman fra Lækjamoti out of Sædis fra Melabergi. The other is a feisty



Halle Brown on Venus from Saga California jumping in Palm Springs, CA. Photo by Elisabeth Haug.

black pinto by Stigandi fra Leysingjastodum II out of Gima fra Ytra-Dalsgerdi.

## SCIR

*Elisabeth Haug:* The Southern California Icelandic Riders started the season with high hopes and plans for abundant action. Then came the EHV-1 outbreak and put a damper on everything. Luckily the threat is over now; probably because California horse owners heeded the warning to keep their horses at home.

Now, we're gung-ho and ready to make up for lost time. Our yearly gymkhana is being rescheduled, and we have two camping trips ready to go. We will also have a tack sale, various workshops, and some philanthropic activity as well as our usual, often impromptu group rides.

We're lucky to have so many opportunities in the area for trail rides, but nothing is as much fun as riding on the beach. Best of all, our horses are just as excited about the ocean as we are.

Our group is currently developing an interest in jumping. It's a greatly overlooked Icelandic horse skill, and showing it off is a great way of creating interest in the Icelandic horse. Nowadays few Icelandic horse owners are aware that both stadium jumping and cross-country used to be part of the European Championship program.

Before the EVH-1 outbreak, junior member Halle Brown made her mark on the pony-club circuit. She and the rest of her family also came down from Palm Springs for our Fourth of July ride.



# LAST ADVENTURE IN ICELAND

BY JESSICA HAYNSWORTH



Simon fra Efri-Raudalaek, a first-class stallion that was shown at Landsmót. Jessica says, "I have ridden Simon and done some dressage with him, but Baddi mostly trained this horse himself, as he has so much fun riding him." Photo by Jessica Haynsworth.

The Landsmót is now upon us, and for most Icelandic horse enthusiasts and professionals, this is the biggest event of the year. Many consider the Landsmót to be more exciting, even, than the World Championships, and people from all over the world and from all walks of life are now flocking to Skagafjörður to see the greatest mares, stallions, and sport horses in all of Iceland.

While in the past, competitions have been a very high-pressure time for me as Baldvin Ari ("Baddi") Gudlaugsson's sole employee at Efri-Raudilækur, the Landsmót

is actually a time for me to sit back, relax, and enjoy the show. My job these past few months has been training the young horses to prepare them for breeding shows, and helping Baddi school his competition horses in dressage to keep them all light and fit. The Landsmót potentials were our focus in the months since you last heard from me, and project horses like my Dugur had a bit of a break. We put all the energy we had, and then some, into qualifying our young mares, stallions, and sport horses for the Landsmót, and now that it is upon us, my job is finished. So rather than telling

you all about this exciting competition (*see Cindy Westcott's report in this issue*), and what it is like to attend, I will instead tell you the other side of the story: that is, what goes into training and prepping these horses for their moment in the spotlight.

## CHAMPIONS ARE MADE

The qualification process is so difficult that when you are watching a competition like the Landsmót there is no chance at all that you will see a bad horse. Every horse presented will be a superstar, a *gaedingur*, and already a champion in its own right.



While breeding and genetics certainly help, no horse is born a winner—champions have to be made, and for the past year and a half, I have been learning how to make them.

A big focus of the Landsmót is breeding competition, which in the U.S. we often refer to as “breeding evaluations.” At a farm like Efri-Raudilækur, which has an excellent reputation for good breeding and was awarded Breeding Farm of the Year last year, our goal is to have as many horses judged first class (that is, an overall average judgment of 8.00 or higher) as possible each year. The number of horses bearing your farm name that are presented for judgment, as well as the scores they receive, are both taken into account when deciding on Breeding Farm of the Year, and reflect how well a farm’s breeding program is developing each year.

There is less pressure with sport horses. Sport horses of all ages are judged the same: In order to be chosen to compete at the Landsmót, you must be among the best at the tryouts. The horse’s age is not taken into account, nor its appearance. Sport competition is based purely on talent and harmony with the rider and, of course, the ability to perform a competition program flawlessly.

## BEAUTY COUNTS

Breeding horses, on the other hand, must be beautiful: hoof size and shape are especially important. For example, if a horse were to lose a shoe and break its hoof shortly before getting judged, that could severely lower its overall conformation average. It is especially hard to keep the energetic and playful young horses (not to mention the young mares when they go into heat) from doing damage to themselves: playing too hard and throwing a shoe, rubbing a mane or tail, biting or kicking one another in turnout, etc. What’s more, the older a breeding horse gets, the higher it must score to qualify for the Landsmót. A four-year-old mare is required to have an overall average score of 7.80, while a five-year-old mare must have at least 8.20, and it goes on from there. Stallions have even more rigorous requirements, which makes sense because they are capable of passing on their genes on a much greater scale than mares are; therefore, stallions must be held to very high standards.

Because the qualifying scores are

lower for younger breeding horses, there is a fair amount of pressure to get a horse ready to show by the time it turns four. I certainly noticed this at Efri-Raudilækur. Geldings at our farm are usually started a whole year later than young mares and stallions, because there is no hurry to show them. That meant that in the fall, when we brought in this year’s 20 or so young horses (who, in the Icelandic tradition, had had almost no prior contact with humans) the mares and stallions were three years old and the geldings were four.

At Christmastime, we put most of the young geldings back on the farm for a break, and focused our training on the mares, stallions, and older sport horses that would be competing all winter. In the spring, we put out any horses that we were sure would not be ready to be judged this year—a few young mares, two young stallions that we had decided to geld after all, and again, an assortment of geldings. That meant that we could go into hyperdrive training and showing what we had left in the stable, which was still more than 30 horses.

## LIGHT AND FIT

Baddi spent most of this time polishing his competition programs with his sport horses, and training the five-year-old stallions, while I focused more on training the young horses, getting them light and fit and ready to be judged, as well as schooling Baddi’s competition horses in dressage when asked, and riding anything that he didn’t have time for on a given day.

I developed very tight bonds with “my” young mares. In many cases I was the only trainer they had ever really known, having worked with them from day one, and I came to look on their achievements with tremendous pride. Baddi knew right off the bat that most of them would not qualify for the Landsmót; it takes place so early in the summer that many of our just-turned-four-year-olds just weren’t ready, although the goal was always to get them as close to ready as possible.

What was frustrating to me as a trainer was when my girls were ready as far as riding talents were concerned, but were held back from competing because they would not yet score high enough for conformation. I worked so hard with them, I wanted to see them show now, but Baddi reminded me that a breeding horse has to be the whole package. If that means waiting an

extra few months or even a year to build up bigger, healthier hooves on a small and petite mare, and to let her grow more mane and tail, and hopefully get taller, then so be it. Those that were not shown at all this spring, or that were shown but did not have a high enough overall score to qualify for the Landsmót, will most likely be shown in August with the hopes of becoming first-class breeding horses, a very high honor indeed.

It really is a long and tiring road to get a horse to the Landsmót, and the life of a professional horse farmer is exhausting. Just think, after the August breeding shows comes September, when 20-plus new untrained three-year-olds will come in from the farm and begin their training! The work is never-ending and sometimes overwhelming, but also intensely rewarding.

## TEARS AND JOY

I confess to actually shedding tears when I watched Kolka frá Efri-Raudalæk, a mare that, only months before, had been started under saddle by yours truly, become a first-prize mare and qualify for the Landsmót without even presenting pace, a gait that she has just started to be trained in and could someday receive an 8.00 for, according to Baddi. It feels exactly as I imagine sending one’s child off to college must feel: You are so incredibly proud of them, and you can’t believe how fast they grew up, but there is also a feeling of sadness because you know that they are no longer yours to train. They will go on to great things, either as competition horses or broodmares, but there is no time, in a business like Baddi’s, to keep a horse in training longer than is necessary.

There are always more horses coming in, more champions to train, and more girls such as myself arriving from around the world each year to do that training. I am simply glad that I got the opportunity to experience the things I have during my time here. I’ve really learned a lot about what I am physically and emotionally able to handle.

## YES YOU CAN

When I arrived in Iceland, my confidence in my ability to make a horse better each time I rode it was very limited, and I wasn’t altogether sure that I should be trusted with actually training young horses and being the person who shapes everything they know and understand about being a

riding horse. Under Baddi's careful watch, however, I gained confidence in my abilities, and I never stopped asking questions, desperate for his opinion on everything. I knew I was improving as a trainer and rider, however, when Baddi started asking for *my* opinion. I was shocked the first time he asked me to watch him ride a program and give him feedback. The idea that someone so successful would think that my opinion could be valuable was a real eye-opener for me.

I think that I never felt better about myself, however, than the first time that Baddi left me in charge of the stable. At first it was just for an afternoon or so at a time, but in the heat of the show season sometimes he would go to competitions alone or with his father to help him, and leave me as the sole caretaker of the stable for four or five days. That's 30-plus horses, and only me in charge of feeding, turnout, and riding. I knew then that Baddi really trusted me, which I realized must mean I'm trustworthy. After a few

days taking care of such a huge training stable on my own, I felt like I could do just about anything, an amazing feeling for someone who never really had much self-confidence before.

If there's one thing that living in Iceland has taught me, it's that we're all capable of more than we think we are. Four-year-old mares can blast down a breeding track in all five gaits, young children can compete in fast tölt on first-prize stallions, and a nervous 19-year-old American girl can be trusted to care for and train a stable of horses without ruining anything.

So let's all strive to push ourselves and our horses just a little bit farther from our comfort zones, and see what happens. Let's make ourselves ride on those hot summer days and frigid winter nights. Let's practice our dressage even when it's boring, or when we're tired and sore. Let's ask more of our horses than we have in the past, because believe me, they are much stronger and more powerful than

we think they are. Let's all try one thing with our horses that we never thought we'd be able to do, because based on what I've seen here, I think we'll all be pleasantly surprised with the results.

*Learn more about where I've been living and working at: <http://www.efiraudilaekur.is>.*

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Kolka fra Efri-Raudalaek, a first-class mare and Landsmot competitor that Jessica started under saddle and trained all winter. "The picture was taken the first day that we put halters on the young horses and attempted to lead them up and down the stable aisle. They were fresh off the farm, never handled before, and I had no instructions from Baddi other than 'Put halters on the young horses and lead them around a little.' My coworker at the time, Lili, and I proceeded to get dragged and slammed around for the next five hours. I think it was the hardest work-day of my life! Baddi just laughed and said, 'The first day is always the hardest.' I think he bought us ice cream afterwards." Photo by Jessica Haynsworth.



# A HISTORIC LANDSMOT

BY CINDY WESTCOTT, PHOTOS BY MARTINA GATES

The history of the huge biannual Icelandic horse festival called Landsmot stretches back to 1950, with the first one being held in Thingvellir National Park. Landsmot embodies the respect Icelanders have for the Icelandic horse. Today it includes competition classes, as well as a breeding evaluation show. Only the best horses can participate in this biannual event. But it's not only about competing: The fellowship of riders and the singing and dancing are important factors in making Landsmot the special event that it is.

The 2011 Landsmot wasn't supposed to happen. But due to illnesses that fell upon the horses in Iceland during the winter and spring of 2010, the Landsmot for that year was cancelled for the first time in history. So to keep Landsmot in the correct years (years in which there is not a FEIF World Championship), it will happen next year as well.

The 2011 Landsmot was held in the north of Iceland at the Vindheimamelar showgrounds in Skagafjörður. It started on June 26 and ended on July 3. Being a first-timer to Landsmot, I didn't know what to expect. I was just happy to know that I was going to be able to watch this beautiful breed perform at their best for a whole week! There were plenty of horses this year, but the spectator numbers were down. The majority were local people. The usual European crowd had a big event as well so they were unable to attend.

After meeting up in the airport at Keflavik, Martina Gates, Andrea Hanson, and I rented our little car—somehow managing to get all our luggage into it. We headed north on a beautiful, warm Icelandic day. When driving in Iceland, if you see a road sign that is a picture of a camera make sure to check your speed—a photo will be taken of your license plate. I thought the sign meant “Photo opportunity!” But every spot in Iceland is a photo opportunity. The country is beautiful. The five-hour ride to where we stayed in Thingeyrar ([www.thingeyrar.is](http://www.thingeyrar.is)) went by so quickly, as the scenery was just breathtaking.



Diva fra Alfholum is the highest judged mare at Landsmot, with 10 for tolt and 10 for spirit.

Soon we met up with our wonderful tour guide, Kristjan Kristjansson of Thor Icelandics in New York. His “hill judging”—at Vindheimamelar the spectators sit on a grassy hillside to watch the competitions—was right on the mark. Kristjan was the best source of information I could ask for. His daughter Thorunn came in a day later with her boyfriend, who had never been to Iceland. The fun and the laughter was non-stop. Throughout the week, we would see familiar faces every day: Alice and Mark Peal from Vermont, Gudmar Petursson from Kentucky, and Susan Peters, also from Vermont, just to name a few. Rick Lamb was even there doing a segment for his RFD TV show.

## GAEDINGAR

At Landsmot, there were classes for children, teenagers, young adults, and, of course, the open classes for the highest level of riders. There was a breeding evaluation show going on simultaneously, where only the horses with the highest

scores, as judged in evaluations prior to Landsmot, were allowed to participate. The competitions continued into semi finals and ended with finals for the highest scoring horses.

The first days of Landsmot are taken up by preliminary contests of Gaedingar A (five gait) and Gaedingar B (four gait). “Gaedingar” is an Icelandic word for an awesome riding horse (plural, “gaedingar”). These competitions follow a different format from what we do here in the U.S. or at the FEIF World Championships. It was interesting to me as I had never been to any competitions in Iceland. I wish I had read up on the Gaedingar classes before I arrived, because I was a little lost at first. The Landsmot Handbook was an excellent source of information, however—a “must-have” for every visitor. First stop when you enter the showgrounds should be the information booth to get your Landsmot Handbook.

As the handbook explained, in the A Class Gaedingar Five-Gait Preliminaries



there are three horses on the track at a time, ridden on the left rein. The following gaits are shown: 1. two rounds of tolt, any speed; 2. two rounds of trot, any speed; 3. one sprint of pace, one horse at a time. The marks are weighed this way: the tolt score times two, the trot score times one, the pace score times two, the score for willingness or spirit times two, the score for beauty under saddle times two. Then the judges divide the total by nine. Got that?

In the semi-finals, there is only one horse on the track at a time. The rider has three rounds to show all gaits (walk, trot, tolt, gallop, and pace) and is allowed to turn around once. The rider can use the straight track once to show the pace, if desired.

The finals are divided into A and B finals, for a total of 15 horses. The B-finals take place first, and the winner of those finals earns the right to compete in the A-finals. The riders show any tempo tolt, up to two rounds on each rein. They show up to two rounds of trot on each rein and two pace sprints. They are not allowed to use a crop or whip in this competition.

## HOW IT COMPARES

Here's how that compares to the Five-Gait Open we're used to in USIHC competition (in the FEIF FIPO rule book, it's class F1). In the F1 preliminary round, riders compete individually. The test may be ridden on either rein. The rider has four and a half rounds to show the following gaits in any order: 1. Slow to medium speed tolt; 2. Slow to medium speed trot; 3. Medium walk; 4. slow to medium speed canter; 5. Racing pace. Each gait may be shown only once, with walk for a half round and the other gaits for a full round. The racing pace is shown on the long sides of the track only. The marks for tolt and pace are doubled.

There are no semi-finals. In the final round, the finalists ride together and show the five gaits in the order instructed by the announcer, as described in FIPO section 5.4.2. The rein is determined pursuant to FIPO section 5.5. The horses may show racing pace three times on the long side of the track. The riders choose which long side to use by a majority vote. The marks for pace and tolt are doubled. Crops and whips are allowed.

So the two types of competition really are quite different.



The red chestnut in front of this group of riders at the opening ceremony of Landsmot 2011 is Sigur fra Hólbaki, son of the stallion Parker fra Solheimum, owned by Solheimar Farm in Vermont.

## BREEDING SHOW

The breeding evaluation started with the seven-year-old and older mares. The second mare on the track was a four-gaited mare; there were only four four-gaited mares in that class of 14, as it is very hard to score high enough to qualify for Landsmot without showing pace. This beautiful mare was Diva fra Alfholum; her total score was 8.24. It was my first time actually watching a horse with a score of 10 for tolt. Perfect! The five-gaited, seven-year-old mare who won the top spot was



Spuni fra Vesturkoti is the highest judged horse in the world now, with 10 for pace and 10 for spirit (9.25 total rideability).

“Thora fra Prestsbae.” She went into the final round with an 8.72, raising that in the finals to an 8.77 overall; she received a perfect 10 in pace and an 8.5 in tolt.

The highest scoring stallion was the amazing “Spuni fra Vesturkoti.” He kept increasing his score each time he was shown. He came into the breed evaluation with an 8.66 overall score, proceeded to break the world record with an 8.87, then went up even higher in the finals, receiving an overall score of 8.92! He received a 9.5 for tolt, 9.5 for trot, 10 for pace, 8.5 for gallop, 9.5 for spirit, and 9.5 for form under rider; his total rideability score totaled 9.25!

Spuni was a truly incredible horse. He showed his brilliance with gaits that looked easy, natural, and flowing. He is only five years old, so I can't wait to see him grow up. If he passes on his character, natural talent, spirit, and conformation, he could be a future “honor stallion.” Thordur Thorgeirsson received the Trainers Association Rider of the Year award for his beautiful presentation of Spuni, as well as several other breeding horses.

To be an “honor stallion” is the highest award at Landsmot. The stallions that received the “honor stallion” award this year were:

- IS1998187054 Gari fra Audsholthjaleigu
- IS 1998184713 Aron fra Strandarhofdi
- IS1993186930 Adam fra Asmundarstodum
- IS1997158469 Hagangur fra Narfastodum

## DEBATE ABOUT WALK

One of the fun things to do at Landsmot is to learn about and discuss the big questions in the Icelandic horse world with the people sitting next to you on the “hill.” I asked Alice Peal to summarize the debate about the walk scores.

Alice writes, “How the breeding scores are determined is always up for debate, discussion, and adjustment. I believe that when you are making choices on breeding the right mare and stallion, you need to use all the information available. It’s important to not just look at a gait score, but also at the judge’s comments.

“I think the current debate about walk centers on the new weighting of the score. I think that score is important because it can give you valuable information on how the horse moves overall. Walk can indicate stiffness, short strides, suppleness, correct or irregular beat, etc. In the WorldFengur database, we can compare a five-gaited horse who scored 8.5 for tolt, but 6.5 or 7 for walk with the comments ‘pacy’ or ‘stiff,’ to a four-gaited horse who scored 9 for tolt, but 7 for walk with the comments ‘irregular beat,’ to a horse who scored ‘evenly’ in all gaits with a score of 8.5 for walk and tolt. This horse received comments of ‘correct beat’ and ‘big movements’ in walk and tolt.

“Watching a horse move in walk can also give you conformation information: You can go back to the conformation scores to help determine why the horse moves the way it does. All this information is valuable when selecting the mare or stallion to breed to, and for considering which horse might make the best competition horse, the best five-gaiter, or the best four-gaiter.”

## U.S. CONNECTIONS

While sitting on the “hill,” I also kept an eye open for horses that I knew had American connections. In the breeding show, Karen McFarland, an NEIHC member from Massachusetts, holds an interest in a four-year-old four-gaited stallion named Eldur fra Torfunesi. He received a 9 for tolt, 9.5 for trot, 5 for pace, 8.0 for gallop, 9.5 for spirit, 9 for form under rider, and 7.5 for walk, receiving a total score of 8.36.

In B-group four-gait competition, Nanna fra Halldorsstodum, ridden by Solvi Sigurdarson, was owned jointly with Susan Peters of Silver Maple Icelandics, VT.

Nanna placed 30th in the competition with a score of 8.45; there were 101 entries in that class.

Sigur fra Holabaki, with his beautiful liver-chestnut coloring, is a son of Parker fra Solheimum (owned by USIHC members Sigrun Brynjarsdottir and Jason Brickner in Vermont). Sigur led the opening ceremony, which took place Thursday evening. This was the most emotional part of Landsmot for me. To see 300-plus Icelandics parade out at once in beautiful tolt, riding close together with many of their riders carrying flags, was incredible. The organization and the spirit of it all made it flawless. There were 47 clubs represented from all over Iceland—which, by the way, is only the size of our state of Kentucky!

## ONE-OF-A-KIND

Landsmot is a one-of-a-kind experience. To be there is to see all the energy at the show: the love for the breed, the brilliance of the horses, to make new friends and see old ones from all over the U.S., and to simply have a great time. For owners and breeders of Icelandics in the U.S., it is so important to go and see these horses in their homeland. At first, I thought it would be too expensive for me,

but after doing some research I found it to be surprisingly affordable. If you go in a small group and split the expenses it becomes even more affordable. There are companies out there to work with on organizing trips to Landsmot.

There is so much Iceland can still offer to the Icelandic horse. Going to Landsmot proved that to me. After coming back from Iceland, I couldn’t wait to tell my stories to my friends and family, and I was so excited to ride my horses. Landsmot put me in hyper-drive for the Icelandic horse, and gave me a greater respect for them. As Martina Gates said, “If you could get drunk on Icelandic horses, I would be loaded for two weeks!”

In closing my first article ever written, I have to say that my week in Iceland was one of the best experiences of my life. I will never forget and will always treasure it. The food was great. There were vendors for all your shopping needs. There were great people. And there was the best of the best Icelandic horses. It was so worth the trip. I am counting down the days until the 2012 Landsmot in Reykjavik!

For more information on Landsmot go to: [www.landsmot.is](http://www.landsmot.is). They also have a Facebook page.



The majestic opening ceremony of Landsmot 2011, which was held in Skagafjörður in northern Iceland.



# PHOTOGRAPH YOUR HORSE!

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ELISABETH HAUG

The electronic revolution and the Internet have turned the world topsy-turvy. Cell phone cameras, emails, YouTube, and Facebook have changed the way we communicate. Photography and video have become our new universal language. Nowadays, one of the most effective ways to spread the word about the Icelandic horse is through photographs. If we all “join hands” and bombard the world with pictures of our horses, we will make a difference.

Photography is a fun, useful, and rewarding pastime regardless of whether you are a professional, a point-and-shooter, or you stick to your cell phone. Today our equipment and editing software choices are endless and don't have to be expensive in order to provide great results. Yet, there is a flip side. When photos were a novelty, people were willing to spend time looking at each one. Nowadays, even if you catch the viewers' attention, you have less than a second to stand out—to connect with them and engage them.

I thoroughly enjoy photography, and am pleased with the time and effort I have invested in the skill. Not only are the results gratifying, but when editing the individual pictures, I relive the magic moments they depict. Honing my eye has also made me see more clearly—added a new dimension to my awareness of my surroundings, so to speak.

My purpose in this article is to offer a few suggestions to what you can do to make your Icelandic horse photos have an impact. But before I go any further, I should, perhaps, tell you a little about myself and my personal Icelandic horse photography experience.

## THE LOVE AFFAIR

I fell in love with Icelandic horses in the late '60s when they were reintroduced to Germany, Austria, Holland, and Denmark, where I lived at the time. The love affair has lasted. All these years later, I still adore them.

It didn't take me long to get heavily



This photo was taken in May 2011 in Iceland, on the road from Selfoss to the ocean. The local riding club was having their annual spring ritual—a ride to the ocean to bathe the horses after a long winter inside the barns. I love the harmony and the showmanship.

involved in the cause—importing, breeding, and selling. In the '70s, the Icelandic horse movement spread like a wildfire through Europe, with Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, and England joining in the frenzy. The decade that followed was exciting. Before long the Icelandic horse was the second largest breed in Denmark, and often groups of 50 or more riders were seen toting together through the woods. There was also the fun of international shows, exhibitions, and all sorts of other social events.

In 1978 my family and I moved to Paso Robles, CA. We brought a planeload of Icelandics with us and expected them to make the same kind of waves they had in Europe. We weren't aware of how the great distances in the United States

would hamper our cause and that we had settled plum in the middle of cowboy country. Everybody there believed that only Quarterhorses cut the mustard! We humans only see what we want to see. It didn't even make a dent when our first effort at team penning placed us as number three among 60 teams. Our success only made our fellow competitors insist more fervently that riding on ponies in English saddles was a joke. Little did they take into account the fact that the Icelandic horse has been used for herding sheep and horses for a thousand years.

The first years were an uphill battle, although equally exciting in their own way. Part of the challenge was the vastness of the country. A large part of the Icelandic horse experience will always be



communing with other Icelandics and their enthusiastic owners. Most of our time and effort went into promotion—parades, demonstrations, open houses, gaited shows, endurance racing, team penning, TV and other news spots, magazine articles, and news releases. Slowly but surely a niche was carved.

Over the years we participated in the Rose Parade six times. Each time, Colorado Boulevard was lined with a million and a half live spectators. Simultaneously, the event was watched by 150,000,000 people worldwide. In one of his TV commentaries, Bob Eubanks coined one of my favorite quotes: “*The Icelandic horse is more than a horse. He is a friend!*”

I wanted the horses I bred to grow up as naturally as possible, the way they do in Iceland. Down the line I was able to lease a thousand-acre ranch close to Santa Barbara. It had a mile-long front-

age along Highway 101, and I was able to put up large signs advertising the breed. The horses were very content there. Cars stopped in droves to admire the beautiful herd and—like true hams—the horses enjoyed the attention. During the day, they grazed and played along the freeway. At night they went up in hills to enjoy the freedom and the view.

But soon, the time had come for me to step back and let others take over the more active breed promotion. Around the turn of the millennium, I began to sell off my herd. None of my children were interested in inheriting the responsibility of a herd of 230 Icelandic horses. Also it was time for me pursue some of the many other interests I had put on hold. I moved to San Diego in 2003. Here I began my quest as a professional photographer.

## **ALWAYS MORE TO LEARN**

Photography and Icelandic horse riding are alike, inasmuch as you can enjoy both immensely without much experience or knowledge. On the other hand, no matter how advanced you become in either area, you will only have uncovered the tip of the iceberg. There is always more to learn and new areas to explore. The one thing that differentiates the two activities is that whereas hay prices have gone up, the cost of external hard drives has plummeted.

When I made my career change, I realized that digital photography—rather than film—was the future. But I don’t think anyone could have predicted just how much our lives were about to change. Today, it’s impossible to fathom how we ever got along without our highly developed Internet and our advanced wireless phone services. Over time I have made an



Taken in 2007 close to Blondaas, Iceland, in a farmer’s field. I liked the colors, the balance, and the playful friendship.





Taken in 2007 close to Blondaas in the same farmer's field. I like the balance in the photo—the pose and the feeling of fun and easy camaraderie.

effort to advance my photography skills, and have gone out of my way to learn from more savvy photographers. Now I feel it is time for me to pass the baton.

## MAKE AN IMPACT

Photography is a language of emotions. The most important thing, if you want to make an impact with your pictures is to come from your heart. The list of things

you can do to enhance your photography is endless! But these are some of the steps I find most important.

*Dare to be different!* Develop a personal style. The chance that you can improve on what has already been done to distraction is slim. Experiment with alternate points of view.

*Shoot with passion!* Become clear about what it is that triggers *your feelings*

about a subject and *exactly* what you want to convey to your viewers. Put your impressions into words and focus on portraying them in your imagery. The first words that come to my mind when I picture an Icelandic horse are charisma; connection; love of life; unpretentious beauty; light, fluid motion; courage; dauntless; and animated. What are *your* words?

*Clarify your communication!* We all know that a picture speaks a thousand words. Make sure “every word” you put into your image adds value and clarifies the point you want to make. Choose an uncomplicated background and crop away anything distracting.

*Draw your viewer's eye to your subject of interest.* Make sure your subject is in focus. Know that the human eye is drawn to: motion, eyes, brightness, color, sharpness, lines, texture, patterns, and position. (TV and other multimedia have taught us to focus our attention one third away from the edges of an image.) Make sure that whatever objects fall into any of the categories above are of importance to your story.

*Utilize action!* Photographers shy away from action because they perceive it as difficult. The answer is—like when you are riding—to practice and to become proactive rather than reactive. Every camera, as well as your finger on the shutter, has lag time. Follow the movement with your camera and shoot an instant ahead of time to accommodate that lag. When photographing moving horses, focus on



Taken in 2009 in Montana at Leslie and Dean Skinner's ranch. I love the fun, the joy, and the movement.



the flying carpet action of the horse's back, rather than on his befuddling legs.

## CONTACT

For more photo tips and tricks, see Elisabeth's website <http://IcelandicsOnTheGo.com>. There you can also view more of her photos and read about her workshops, books, prints, and other endeavors. In May 2012, she will be conducting a series of four-day photo workshops in Iceland, in association with the trekking company Eldhestar. As she writes, "Over the years I have made numerous photo-taking trips to our horse's native country. The clinics will be modeled on my joyful experiences during these ventures. There is always fun and constant activity in Iceland—great photo opps no matter what direction you look."



Taken in 2007 in Iceland in Reynir Adalsteinsson's pasture in Hvammstangi, Iceland. I love the humor and the innocence of the photo.



Taken in May 2011 in Hveragerdi, Iceland. A trek is leaving Eldhestar, one of Iceland's largest and oldest trekking companies. I like the colors, the lines, the beauty of the landscape, and the feeling of beginning an adventure.



# WHO IS NICKI?

INTERVIEW BY ALEX PREGITZER



Nicki competing in the 2009 Bedford Riding Lanes Association Hunter Pace in Bedford, NY, on Haukur Freyr fra Hofnum. Photo by Kathy Mathew.

## WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND?

In 2008 I received my FEIF Trainer Level 1 certification. I moved to a house with a barn and pasture for my two Icelandic horses. It was also the year I turned 50! I stood at the threshold of a new chapter in my life.

When I was growing up near Munich, Germany, Icelandic horses were just beginning to become popular as many Germans were looking for an alternative to the military riding schools. They began looking beyond their borders at different breeds and riding styles.

If you are born with what is commonly known among horsepeople as “the bug,” you have a passion for horses that you must pursue your whole life. To my family’s consternation, I was always on a mission to spend as much time as possible

in the company of any horse I could lay my hands on. I galloped retired thoroughbreds through the Bavarian woods and fields. I begged and worked for dressage lessons and horse camp. When I was an au-pair in Canada, my host family had western Quarterhorses and I became a cowgirl. At 18, desperate, I found a beautiful warmblood mare in a nearby field whose owner would let me ride her for free. She was an abused and extremely dangerous horse. I devised my own training method (hint: bread and sugar cubes) to be able to touch her, saddle her, and eventually ride her and not get bitten, kicked, or bucked off! Looking to learn more about alternative training methods I spent a summer with Linda Tellington-Jones in California and later worked for her as her secretary and translator in Germany. She was just developing her

TTEAM method then and it was a very exciting time for me.

Life took a different turn as I met my future husband and my parents moved to the U.S., followed by us in 1982. I studied graphic design and had two children. No time or money for horses. But the horse bug lies dormant, only to come back ever more virulent. We lived in Southern California at the time. I had a four-year-old daughter who had inherited the bug, and we needed to ride. We found Siri Larsen who trained and taught the beautiful American jumping style. One of her hallmarks was to start children bareback and to take the saddles of the adults away until “we had found our seat.” Riding cross-country and what is now known as natural horsemanship were part of her extraordinary method to produce happy horses and good riders.



Nicki riding Fengur fra Litlu-Asgeirsa in loose-rein tolt. Photo by Lisa Keller.

“Insanity is hereditary—you get it from your children.” This happened to my poor parents. They had never ridden before, but when they moved to Wyoming in 1994, they wanted to explore nature on horseback. We bought two handsome and dependable Icelandic geldings from Betsy

Covert. I was now in charge of teaching Mom and Dad how to ride and keep horses, and believe me, it is much more challenging than teaching your children.

Mom, my daughter, and I traveled to Iceland in 2001 to see where the horses came from. We stayed at Thingeyrar, where Helga Thoroddsen put me on her show horses. Lightning struck: These were horses unlike anything else I had ever experienced. Since then I have returned to Thingeyrar many times, to learn more about genuine Icelandic training and riding, and to recharge my batteries.

In 2004 I bought Fengur, my “lucky catch.” A big, bay natural toltier by Orri, a dream of a horse. We went to Icelandic clinics and horse shows and I met all my new best friends. We joined the NEIHC and performed with the drill team. We took part in Equine Affaire. I taught him to jump, and we won hunter paces. I went to Landsmót with Martina Gates and started writing for *Tolt News*. Together with Martina, I developed and organized the first NEIHC youth camp and show with young riders from different disciplines. The following year, 2007, Martina and I took an international youth group with participants from the U.S., Germany, and Iceland to Thingeyrar for a week of Icelandic riding. It was a blast.

Katrin Sheehan invited me to partici-

pate in the first-ever FEIF Level 1 trainer course in the U.S. with the legendary Walter Feldmann. Had all my years of diverse experience with different kinds of horses, the jumping, dressage, bareback riding, western riding, longeing, ponying, and hunter pacing prepared me for this test? Did reading all the books, watching great instructors, taking countless lessons and clinics, and teaching my children and parents how to ride prepare me to do this professionally? Did I, an amateur, have what it took?

The answer, thankfully, was yes.

## WHAT IS YOUR TRAINING PHILOSOPHY?

When you buy an Icelandic horse, you don’t just buy a horse, but a small piece of Iceland. The horse is proud and beautiful, and it brings the wide-open plains and the wind and rain, snow and sun of Iceland with it. These horses are full of joy and love to move. When we sit on their backs, we borrow a bit of their freedom and spirit. My training goal is to preserve this essential Icelandic-ness.

We cannot offer the horses the windswept plains of Iceland and the challenges of its environment here in the U.S. So we must be inventive. In order to have a happy and cooperative partner as a riding horse, we must understand the



With the herd at Thingeyrar in Iceland. Photo by Helga Thoroddsen.





Nicki and Haukur Freyr fra Hofnum riding in the 2010 Rockefeller Pace. Photo by Herbert

big picture. The Icelandic horse is a social animal and it needs the company of other Icelandic horses. It must not be locked up alone in a stall all day, but needs to be out in a paddock or pasture with a group where it can run and play. The Icelandic environment poses many challenges. If we drill our horses only on the track and in empty arenas, they get bored to death and eventually become dull. Watching Benni Lindal's training tape is a monthly exercise for me—it reminds me how I should use my environment to keep my horse's interest, challenge his considerable intelligence, and have fun together!

It is not all about the riding. My training method starts with good and Icelandic-appropriate horse keeping, grooming, Tellington-Touch, correct shoeing, well-fitting tack, ground work, double-longeing, free longeing, and walks on foot (yes) with horses and dogs. Variety in training is a must. I alternate

arena and track work with trail rides. For example, I work on correct musculing and suppleness with dressage exercises, but then I also use the same exercises for mastering trail obstacles. It all comes together in a healthy, happy, willing, and able partner and pure joy on the ride.

### WHAT IS YOUR TEACHING PHILOSOPHY?

Why do we ride horses? It is the thrill of borrowing their strength and speed and ability to move. We experience great joy when this formidable animal answers to our lightest request with pleasure and enthusiasm. When we feel "as one."

I love teaching beginners and children. There is something very wonderful and enjoyable about being a beginner. Imagine tolt or cantering for the first time, again! They have lots of respect for the horse, enthusiasm, and a willingness to learn.

My teaching method follows my training method: It is very Icelandic specific. Again, it is not all about the riding. Playing with a fresh horse in the round pen is fun and takes the wiggles out, so a safe trail ride can follow. Learning good grooming, tacking, leading, longeing, ground work, and communicating with body language lays the basics for leadership and understanding. Icelandic horses are different from other breeds because they have a genuine willingness and joy of moving. They are often sensitive and quick both in body and mind. My students learn from the beginning to appreciate these wonderful traits and how to communicate safely and effectively. I take the lessons out on the trail as soon as possible and work with each rider and horse combination individually. My goal is always to make the ride fun for both horse and rider, then the best learning happens. And soon also that awesome feeling: as one.

### WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR ICELANDIC HORSES IN THE U.S.?

My greatest hope is for the Icelandic horse to remain "Icelandic," even here. Have you heard that phrase "good for the American market"? It means a horse only a frail Icelandic grandmother would ride. Let's not go there, please.

Let our horses be "awesome," not



Riding bareback, Nicki gets Haukur Freyr fra Hofnum to stand on a box. Photo by Jutta Harrer.

"cute." Let's make sure we keep them in an Icelandic-appropriate social setting with room to move. Let's not just drill them endlessly on the track, but ride out and trot and tolt and gallop and pace. In company! If we can keep Iceland in the horse, the market will follow, and we will attract the young people and the good riders and the ones who will love and preserve this joyful and spirited creature.

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# A YEAR OF CLINICS

BY HELGA THORDARSON

In late 2010, my horse and I embarked on a one-year program—an experiment of sorts. Imported in 2007, Tyr fra Ytri-Kongsbakka is talented and well-trained. From the start, my aspiration was simply to be worthy of my horse or, as we often say in franker moments, to “not ruin him.” After working hard for three years—attending clinics, lessons and some months of full-time training—our progress leveled off. I struggled with doubt, questioned my abilities, and wondered, frankly, if I had aimed too high in buying an expensive horse with the plan to “do it right” this time.

Disappointed, I was tempted to just throttle back. We all have limits, after all. Life is stressful, the economy tanked, and there is only so much that a middle-class professional with a full-time job and family can take on. I enjoyed my horses and put in the time (trail riding, Rose Parades, trail trials, some showing, training activities), but was at stasis in terms of actual skill level. I had not advanced significantly and was no doubt repeating mistakes, year after year.

Finding an excuse to ease off would have come as a relief, frankly, as I could use a nice long rest. Throttling back would have offered face-saving cover, too, for falling short of my goals. But becoming a better rider is my life dream. No matter how legitimate the obstacles, one day I would certainly come to regret letting that dream go. And having recently turned 50, if I was to go to the next level, it had to be soon. So, pulling back was not in the cards.

## TRY HARDER?

Perhaps I needed to simply *try harder*. Tyr and I had been working quite hard already. We were doing well, overall, with increased fitness, lots of trail riding, and regular schooling. But it was frustrating to find, time after time, that a week after a lesson or clinic I had forgotten what we'd learned. I engaged in self-recrimination about repeated failures to recreate clinic-level performance upon returning home. Several times I even considered selling Tyr, feeling guilty about purchasing an expen-



Helga concentrates hard on a challenging slalom course of cones. Tyr's eyes are bright because the clinics feel like play-days.

sive horse when this money could have gone to our college fund. As a working mother with many obligations, *what was I thinking?* How could it come as a surprise to find I lacked the time and resources to pursue this ... folly?

And so it went. At some point, thankfully, I realized that these machinations were placing great pressure on Tyr to fulfill *my* dreams. Laboring under the see-saw burden of my expectations and disappointments was grinding us into the ground. Tyr is very much approval-seeking and when anyone is displeased he is extremely concerned, showing exaggerated, Eeyore-like facial expressions and a furrowed brow. My trainer, Steinar Sigurbjornsson (who functions in the role of a coach to both rider and horse), helped me see that Tyr was surely picking up my tension, urgent strivings, and rush to arrive at some ideal place of accomplishment envisioned far in our future.

Though never fully articulated, I realized that because Tyr was expensive my expectations were very high and at some level I expected certain things in

return for my time and money. Seeing this dynamic of entitlement in myself was an unsettling epiphany. Tyr could neither grasp nor participate in that *quid pro quo*. It was time to stop foisting personal needs and aspirations onto my horse. Tyr is a pure being and a profoundly innocent friend, connected to me and dependent ... perceptive, generous-hearted, ready to give all that he has. I was going about all of it in the wrong way—at some level conveying frustration and disapproval, evaluating against some standards where Tyr and I continually came up short. This was all quite subtle, but it had to change.

This left me puzzled and at a crossroads: I did not want to lower my expectations *or* keep working at it, only harder. I needed some peaceful clarity and a new way. For a host of reasons, I chose a third path and embarked on a one-year plan that called for a wholesale change in mindset and full-tilt commitment to an intensive clinic series.

I stopped grinding away with Tyr in a Type A, achievement-oriented fashion, and *banished all expectations*. With the help of





"I love this close-up," Helga says. "It captures the intense, 'warm, bright, listening' attitude that Tyr has developed."

my coach, I relaxed, stopped focusing on outcomes and came alive in the here and now. I cleared my mind before walking to the barn and greeted Tyr each day with warm, mindful acknowledgment (and a long exhale). I started saying "thank you" to him aloud for everything nice he did and, ultimately, concluded that we (Tyr and I) *had nothing to prove to anyone*. This changed everything.

Our story, which might have been about settling for less or, more likely (due to my innate stubbornness) perseverance

and striving, was recast as a tale of transformation: How Tyr and I paradoxically found happiness, harmony, and partnership by *not trying so hard and letting go*.

We are now at the midpoint of our one-year program and have done five clinics in six months. This required sacrifice and penny-pinching. But it has proved eye-opening, even exhilarating. Our breakthrough happened for a variety of reasons—much of it related to specific practices and a structured personal program. Clinics and a great teacher are essential parts of the equation, but not the whole enchilada. The other factors were an altered outlook and adopting the role of a wholly active end-user.

After 30 years of riding (20 with Icelandics), I am moving up levels and building competencies that eluded me before; Tyr is maintaining gains and becoming a lovely, light riding partner—an "educated," happy horse who is a treat to ride. While we have a long way yet to go on this journey, I have never felt more optimistic about the future. I'd like to share what is working well. Perhaps elements of our story will resonate and some methods will work for those of you who share similar hopes.

### WHAT IS WORKING

*High frequency clinics—each clinic designed to build on the last in stepwise fashion.* Ours have been roughly once per month. Not everyone can attend clinics, but if you can, do it.

If you can work with a trainer to develop a recurring series (where each builds on the last), your work is half done. If you have little or no access to clinics, other elements described here still apply; perhaps you can use video or other resources and work with a buddy to create your own personal "seminar" days and schooling rides.

*Have a plan and commit to it: This requires fierce resolve not to miss clinics.* Clinics are expensive, hard to get to and many of us feel crushed under the weight of other obligations. I committed at the outset of my program to set aside all the sundry, legitimate reasons that each clinic was impossible or inconvenient. *We just went, no matter what.* No excuses. With the support of a very understanding family (and despite floods, holidays, overtime, pay-cuts, furloughs, etc.), we somehow managed to not miss a single one.

*Duration and consistency.* Our clinics provide two days of coaching per month. This amount of structured practice adds up when done on a regular basis.

*Journaling/diagramming of exercises and personal epiphanies for later reference.* I learned to be extremely disciplined about this and immediately write detailed notes about what we learn and do at a clinic. It is easy to put this off and then let it go. Information is not retained without aids, however, and 24 hours later most of it will be gone in a *poof*. Your journal will keep this learning safely cached, "alive" and within arm's reach every time you want to reboot.



Here Steinar patiently teaches Helga while working gently with Tyr on softness.



Helga takes a moment to reflect. "Tyr was serious by nature, with a remote personality. He has become playful, attuned, and entirely accessible."

*Sustained practice/homework between clinics.* Between sessions, I run my own program, including a formal "schooling" day each week. Before saddling up, I envision a specific goal (balanced corners through better use of outside rein, or light downward transitions, or a feeling of forward flow in trot with suspension, etc.) and select the essential "ingredients" from my clinic notebook. We head out and practice those few specific building block exercises. We also incorporate these tools into "just for fun" rides, liberty work, and horse-in-hand hiking. This makes all outings stimulating and each contact with my horse serves to consolidate learning.

*Give your notebook exercises memorable nick-names.* I use "Subtle Slalom" to improve awareness of seat and posture. "We Are of the Body" connects corresponding muscle sets. "Infuse and Swing" gets the hind-end engaged. "Be the Circle" focuses us on the path ahead, in place of stiffening the body and turning inward with down-cast eyes. Nicknames permit easy recall so that exercises can be put to everyday use. (Pack a few for your ride, like peanuts!)

*Develop mottos that capture and name a good feeling—those moments you seek to recreate.* These phrases remind me of flashes of unity and connection with Tyr: "Less is More," "Light and Bright, Happy all the Way" (don't stress!), "It's All in the Timing," and "Big Wheel Locomotive." Other phrases remind me of what's important:

"Just Ride, Even if It's for 15 Minutes" (get out to the barn even and especially when life is busy) or "5 Minutes of Warm-up Changes Everything."

*Hand-hike your horse and show him the world.* This is a uniquely relaxing and effective bonding/training experience. I try to hike weekly, with groundwork and games built in to surprise and delight Tyr. It's like a day off from training, but better. Hand-hiking has deepened our relationship and positive effects compliment and carry over to working rides.

*Stay "with your horse" and don't break the connection when something's not working as planned.* Being too focused on outcomes made me impatient. Tyr occasionally does not back on cue, for example. Balks were met with frustration, the voice in my head saying: "Three years we've worked together and sometimes you just don't want to back up?" Needless to say, this was not helpful and severed the connection with my horse as summarily as a knife's blade. I was abandoning and blaming, when I could instead attend non-judgmentally to Tyr's quirky self-assertions and acknowledge the shared (mis)communication. Now, I check myself and greet these moments with radical acceptance, noting, "A mistake is a window being opened. Thank you for this opportunity, Tyr." Seeing this typed out makes it appear rather stupid, perhaps, but it works. The reframe fundamentally altered how we

## EXERCISE #1: INFUSE & SWING

This sequence begins with basic yielding and ends with a positive burst of forward energy and free-flowing movement. Start on the ground and repeat once in the saddle.

**Infuse & Swing:** Start by standing at your horse's left side, facing his flank, with lead in the left hand. Collect yourself. Be aware of your bearing, as your horse will mirror your movements and manner. Gain his attention, then bend his head softly to the left. With a courtly, graceful gesture, ask him to move his left hip away from you (to his right)—using your right hand as a wand to "infuse" his hind with energy. Start with a light butterfly touch on his hip and release immediately when he swings the hind end away. Aim for light responsiveness: After some practice, he should show a floating, swinging step with the rear legs. Once the horse "gets it," no touch is needed: He will swing away lightly upon the slightest wave of your palm, subtle "leaning in" body posture and expectant eye contact (your eyes looking at his back feet/hind end). Praise and pat him!

**Trot Off:** To encourage free movement, pair the yielding exercise with a surprise release: Invite him to trot with you on a loose lead after he's stepped away nicely. Have a playful attitude and freedom in your body movement as you set off together. Make it a celebration. This is a very effective reward (Tyr loves it). For many years, I ended exercises with a pat and an "Okay, you can stop what you're doing." The reward was removal of the cue and lowered energy output. But this made training duller than necessary (too many dead endpoints) and encouraged less spirit in my horse. Tyr responds more brightly to this trot-off reinforcement (sweet movement!). He looks for it after performing well at something and is more attentive and activated, anticipating what might come next. Training begins to feel like a game. Trot-offs are fun, and I sometimes let out a congratulatory whoop as we set off. We also use trot-offs at liberty, and Tyr especially enjoys that.

**Repeat the sequence in saddle:** Your horse will be primed from the groundwork. With very light rein contact, turn his head left and prepare for Infuse & Swing. When you are both attentive and poised, ask for his hind end to step to the right (using butterfly-light, vibrating left leg contact and a tap of your crop, if needed). When he's responsive, celebrate! Trot off with a happy exaltation, loose rein and no pressure. Trot a few feet, if you like, or make a long celebration of it. The horses love this. It makes them sparkly. The reward is movement.



## EXERCISE #2 : BOW OUR HEADS

This ground exercise is relaxing and connects you and your horse before a ride. Exhale and empty your mind. Do not rush. Slow down and be self-aware. Stand at your horse's head and lightly touch his poll. Stroke the top of his head and cheeks with a featherlight downward motion. Speak to him softly. Wait for him to lower his head. Lower your head. Take your time and bow heads, bit by bit, together. Your horse may like this so much that he starts looking expectantly to you, seeking to engage, and asking to touch his nose to the ground. You will both feel calm and connected as you start your ride. I also use this as a "refresh" button to refocus Tyr if he gets tense, strong, tuned-out, or inattentive during a session.



Relaxing is part of training too.

work through things. I stay with Tyr in the moment, without judgment. (I remain in debt to my coach, Steinar Sigurbjornsson, for this gently delivered, but powerful insight.)

*View the trajectory of foundation-building as a slow and steady process, akin to development of the Spanish Riding School horses.* I have worked with Tyr solidly for over three years, and yet we are only half-way there. I am no longer in a hurry and instead enjoy and appreciate each step along the way.

*Seek mindful awareness and a balanced, clear presence.* My conscious choice to be happy, buoyant, and in-the-moment helped Tyr discover joy and lightness in his movement. I collect myself, clear my head,

and no longer take my troubles to the barn. I give Tyr my best self, as he deserves no less. If I need to unburden myself, I take it to my dog.

*Sing and laugh.* Tyr's temperament falls to the serious side. When I was serious, also, training seemed like a lot of work for us both. Singing and laughing (even whooping and hollering) have added a whole new dimension to our time together. Tyr seems to get a kick out of these antics and responds positively, with good energy. He knows when I burst out in song that he has done something wonderful.

*Expect nothing.* While counter-intuitive, this was key. With a clear mind and no specific expectations, I can simply delight

in discovering any and all gifts my horse and the day's ride bring.

## RESULTS

*Overcoming performance anxiety.* It is easy to find reasons not to attend clinics, as they expose us to scrutiny and potential embarrassments. But frequent clinics engender a sense of familiarity, safety, and support that greatly reduces those insecurities. This serves to combat and extinguish the insidious, self-reinforcing avoidance that takes hold all too easily when clinics are spaced far apart. Getting to the point where you have little to prove to the group and nothing to hide (since everything is transparent and in the open) is extraordinarily liberating and promotes a very effective learning environment.

*Positive peer pressure, camaraderie, and enjoyment.* If you've managed to attend several clinics in a series and are subsequently tempted to bow out, your friends will remind you how much you've learned and how much fun you had last time.

*An effective continuity bridge between clinics, with sustained momentum.* Structured homework between clinics means that progress continues after we return home. I don't perform exercises perfectly, but there is no doubt it's working. Steady, weekly practice between professional consults changed everything and the sky opened.

*Increased ability to accept with equanimity my mistakes and limitations.* I am no longer so concerned with impression management regarding my skills or progress made



Steinar the teacher in action. "Tyr now mirrors my movements, expression, and posture," Helga says. "Our mutual listening skills are growing."

(or not made) with my horse. It is easier to laugh off setbacks and accept them with a receptive mind and an open, hopeful heart.

*Increased independence, autonomy, and competency.* I am amazed to find that I can now achieve good things with Tyr entirely on my own. Clinics, journaling, and homework have consolidated within me (and Tyr) knowledge that before was external. Gains are maintained and accelerating. I did not really believe this was possible, as it never happened before.

*A more confident, educated horse.* Tyr knows what is expected and my cues are far less confusing. He knows his place and purpose, showing growing discipline, work ethic, pride, and a balanced mind. Tyr is a performance athlete and friend, not a “pet.” An attitude of respect, in the context of steady, positive work, has matured him. His spirit is bright and there is a warm glow in his eye.

*A more confident rider.* The acquired skill-set has built my confidence. I have a bag of tools to use when my horse feels heavy on the forehand or when a downward transition is choppy. I am extremely pleased to be making new mistakes in place of the old ones. What I’ve learned with Tyr is helping me get off to a good start with my new horse, Eyvindur fra Oddholli.

*Cost effectiveness.* Paradoxically, high frequency clinics are proving the most financially efficient approach I’ve tried, when measured against the results obtained. I quit clinics altogether a few years back because they were expensive and infrequent—thus results did not justify the cost (especially because I did not know enough to bridge those wide gaps and gains did not hold). After doing the math, I realized that a couple of disconnected, isolated clinics per year cost roughly the same as one month of full training for my horse, so I went that route. My horse got better and better! But, though I worked hard and took lessons, we again did not sustain gains as desired. Moreover, we remained entirely dependent on our trainer for tune-ups, as I could not recreate the performance on my own. In contrast, the recent clinics done in rapid succession cost approximately \$1500. That is a lot of money—a significant investment and collective family sacrifice. But they worked and the results have been life-changing.

*Longevity.* Tyr moves in a more correct, balanced way, with a more balanced rider onboard. His carriage and musculature have improved. These developments may increase the likelihood of continued well-being in his older years. If the clinics (and my improved riding) add a few years to his riding life, they will have paid for themselves.

At the outset, the idea was to go full-tilt for one year and see where it took us. I do not regret this decision or the investment made. Having moved from ambivalence to exuberance, Tyr and I are not the same horse and rider as before. We are both happier—and now are a true team. The plan includes five additional clinics, totaling 10 for the year. And Year Two? I may well start the entire protocol again with Eyvindur. Life is short, after all. We are seizing the day, and a life dream is coming true.

Special thanks to Steinar Sigurbjornsson, who told me in 2007 that Tyr would make me a better rider (he was correct) and who believed in us.

### **EXERCISE #3: SHOULDER WIGGLE**

This in-saddle exercise unlocks your back, shoulders and hips, and produced one of the most dramatic “Aha” moments of my riding life. Warm up your horse and prepare for tolt. At tolt, when you feel balanced, shimmy your shoulders like a burlesque dancer (you know what that means!): Back and forth, up and down, all around. Just wiggle and get very loose. Rotate one shoulder in a circle and then the other—in rhythm with your horse’s beat. The rhythm will come naturally; you will discover that you instantly feel the tolt and melt into your horse’s movement. Your shoulders and hips will be open and moving fluidly with the horse’s back and hips. This gives a sensation of joining or fusing with the horse’s undulating spinal “wave.” You become part of the tolt, instead of sitting on top of it. All excellent riders know this feeling, but I never experienced it until Steinar hollered, as I tolled by, “Wiggle your shoulders, just wiggle them all over!” There is no way to adequately describe the remarkable kinesthetic sensation it brings. Try it!



Smiling eyes at the end of a glorious clinic day with Steinar Sigurbjornsson. “Tyr’s bright, warm, and attuned expression is a testament to how good the clinics have been. Our minds have opened wide and his receptivity to learning has exploded this year.”



# STIKLA: THE GO-TO GIRL

BY DAWN BRUIN-SLOT

In the last issue of the *Quarterly*, I introduced you to Stikla from Wind-song, who at 23 years old embarked on a second career as a therapy horse. Here is an example of what her job is like. Stikla's second session at the Therapeutic Equestrian Center ([www.tecfarm.org](http://www.tecfarm.org)) in Watervliet, MI started off calm and slow, which is exactly what we'd hoped for. Fast and exciting is definitely not the goal for therapeutic riding! Stikla is scheduled for two classes on Mondays and one class on Tuesdays.

Her first Monday rider came out to meet Stikla and learned how to brush her and saddle her up. She's a high functioning girl with minimal physical and mental challenges. She had met Stikla previously, but seemed to really fall in love with her after being able to work one-on-one with her on Monday night. Stikla received a big bearhug around her neck. "I love this horse!" her rider said, before she left for the day. Stikla's second Monday rider was not able to make it out to the first riding lesson of this session, so she'll meet Stikla next week.

## SPEEDY PONY

Tuesday night was more of a challenge, but sweet little Stikla was ready and calmly waiting for it. Her rider on Tuesday nights is both mentally and physically challenged. She can cognitively function and communicate, but her thought process and ability to communicate are clearly impaired quite a bit. She's also blind, and her balance is affected to the point where she needs someone to lean on much of the time.

But her biggest challenge of all was her fear. She was terrified to even come close to a horse, let alone touch Stikla or ride her. She started the lesson by just barely touching Stikla, which caused her to go into a panic. We thought all may have been lost and that she might not even be able to touch Stikla again, let alone ride. So her helper started walking very slowly around the arena with her, and we decided to have Stikla walk very gently and calmly beside her.

Now mind you, Stikla is a very fast



Stikla and her new rider at the Therapeutic Equestrian Center.

walker (her nickname is "the speedy pony"), and she much prefers to move out instead of walk slowly. But that night, she seemed to sense that her rider needed her to walk very slowly and very carefully next to her. So she slowed her pace down to barely a crawl and just kept her head lowered by her rider's side. I don't know if the girl even knew she was right there beside her at first.

## "I FOUND HER EARS"

After a few slow laps around the arena, Stikla, her rider, the rider's helper, the sidewalker, and I decided to just stand in the middle of the arena and let the rider re-group and decide what she'd like to do. I was asked to help lead another therapy horse and rider around the arena while another volunteer held Stikla in the center of the arena. After a few minutes, I peeked over at them to see how things were going,

and to my absolute amazement, I saw the rider petting Stikla's sides and belly. I felt a little leap of joy in my heart as I watched my sweet little mare standing absolutely statue-still while her rider explored her body with her hands. I knew that even one very small step in any direction could cause her rider to become terrified again. I kept peeking over at them while leading the other therapy horse, and every time I looked, I could see that Stikla's rider was becoming more and more comfortable with her, and had even started exploring Stikla with both hands.

The decision was made to try saddling Stikla in the center of the arena while her rider continued to explore her with her hands. Another volunteer took over leading the horse I was with, and I quietly brought over Stikla's saddle and pad. I prayed that she would continue standing stock-still while I very gently placed her pad and saddle on her and tightened the girth. Stikla again did not disappoint me. Her rider continued exploring Stikla and then her saddle and pad with her hands, even running her hands over Stikla's head. When she found Stikla's ears, she let out a squeal of excitement proclaiming "I found her ears!" Through it all, Stikla calmly stood like a soft, warm, fuzzy statue.

## IN THE SADDLE

Her rider then decided that she'd be up to actually getting in the saddle. So we walked Stikla into the mounting ramp area, and asked her to again stand absolutely stock-still while we described to her rider exactly what we needed her to do to get into the saddle. She swung her leg over, and with one leg on the tall mounting ramp and the other across the saddle, went into a panic. She started yelling and moving erratically, trying to understand what her body was doing. I worried that Stikla would shift her weight and try to get away from the chaos, which would have made things much worse. But instead, that smart little mare actually shifted her weight towards her rider, providing some relief from her panic. After almost a full minute of standing that way, her rider was able to get into saddle, and once in the saddle, she was almost instantly comfortable.

Her rider yelled and shouted in delight for almost the entire ten minutes she was able to ride. She had so much fun and enjoyed it so much that it brought tears to my eyes. I knew without a doubt that if she would give Stikla a chance to help bring her out of her comfort zone, she'd have an amazing time. And sure enough, she did. So little Stikla once again helped to melt

her rider's fears and helped her to discover a sense of accomplishment and freedom that she'd not experienced before.

Toward the end of the evening, the riding instructor made the comment to me that even though this was only Stikla's second therapeutic riding session, Stikla was already her "Go-To Girl." My heart swelled with pride. At the end of the night, after almost everyone had left, I quietly stopped to give Stikla a few more scratches and a big "thank you" for being such an amazing horse. Therapeutic riding might be designed to help riders with physical and mental challenges, but it also does wonders for my heart too.

Missy, who is blind and has difficulty balancing, panicked when she first felt Stikla, but when she began to ride, she shouted in delight. All photos courtesy of the Therapeutic Equestrian Center.





# THE WEB TOUR, PART 3

BY JULI COLE



United States Icelandic Horse Congress – Mailing List Archives

Welcome Doug Smith. | Logout | Search

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Calendar, News, Magazine, FAQ Profile, Member List, Regional Clubs Registry, Search, Evaluations Compete, Pleasure Rider About the Breed, Article Reprints, ... Trainers, Riders, ... Board, Committees, Archives Registry Officers, Website help

Archive index :: [notices@lists.icelandics.org](mailto:notices@lists.icelandics.org)

Messages from the following months are available in the archive:

- December 2010
- November 2010
- September 2010
- October 2009
- August 2009
- February 2009
- November 2008
- August 2008
- July 2008

Congress & Breed Promotion  
Board of Directors  
Committees  
Email Archives  
FEIF  
(International Association)  
Constitution  
Quarterly Magazine  
Branded Clothing

The USIHC website at [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org) is a valuable source of up-to-date information about the Icelandic horse, and I encourage all members to visit it often. In January, webmaster Doug Smith and the website committee updated the site to make it more user-friendly. To help you get the most out of your web-browsing experience, the *Quarterly* printed the first part of this “web tour,” covering the Membership and Breed tabs, in our March 2011 issue. The second part, featuring the Ride, Learn, and Train tabs, appeared in our June issue.

The last section of the USIHC website could be considered the administrative section. In these two drop-down menus you will find all pertinent information about the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress, such as the Policies and Procedures, Constitution, Committees, and contact information.

## PROMOTION

The first thing you will find in the drop-down menu called “The Congress” is a tab for information about promotional opportunities, such as the USIHC display booth, availability of the FEIF flag, and possibility

of press releases, with information about who to contact to request these items.

## BOARD

The second tab, titled “Board of Directors,” will take you to a submenu with links to the minutes from the Board’s monthly phone conference meetings. All USIHC members are invited to audit the Board meetings, but if you are unable to attend and would like to know the details, you can easily find the minutes of each meeting here, in descending chronological order. Meeting minutes are stored as PDF files (which means you need Adobe Reader to read them), and the archives go back to 2005, in case you want to track the Board’s discussion of a certain topic.

## POLICIES

The Policies and Procedures tab takes you to the most recently updated version of USIHC’s Policies and Procedures about such things as committee membership, reimbursement of expenses, membership standing, how the *Quarterly* is distributed—basically the methods used by the USIHC Board and committees to conduct normal business.

## PRIVACY

Last in this submenu is the Privacy Policy, which informs you about how the USIHC protects the privacy of its members and the users of its website, and provides instructions for how you can choose to accept or decline to receive electronic notifications from the Congress.

## COMMITTEES

The third and fourth tabs go hand in hand. The Committees tab gives you a list of all of the USIHC Committees. Each committee in turn has its own page, where the names of the chair and the members of the committee can be found, along with contact information for the chair and a description of what the committee does. Often there will be hyperlinks to pages that contain detailed information or forms that the committee has put together for the benefit of the membership.

The fourth tab, Email Archives, contains the records of each committee’s email communications between committee members, a Notices archive, and the Board email archives. The Notices archive is open to all members and non-members to view, as it contains the electronic public

notifications that are periodically sent out with information about the USIHC, events, etc. The committee and Board email archives are only accessible to those people who are members of a committee or are on the Board. If you are a member of one or more committees, the email archives for the committees you are on will automatically be available to you in this section when you log on to the USIHC website with your user name and password.

## FEIF

The FEIF tab leads to a description of the relationship between the USIHC and the international umbrella organization for the Icelandic horse, FEIF; it also includes an interesting article reprint from the 2009 FEIF meeting in Haarlem.

## CONSTITUTION

Next we have the Constitution tab, which will direct you to the USIHC's Constitution. This page of the website provides the most up-to-date version. So if you joined the USIHC 10 years ago and would like to see what changes have been made over the years, this page will provide you with the information.

## QUARTERLY

The Quarterly tab provides all of the necessary information about the USIHC's quarterly magazine: our advertising rates, instructions on how to place an ad or submit an article, how to request additional copies of the current issue or back issues, and a hyperlink to the archived issues.

## BRAND

The final tab in the Congress section provides information on buying USIHC-branded clothing and accessories. The USIHC recognized that members often liked to have clothing or accessories that have the USIHC logo on them. However, it was also recognized that people have varying tastes, and that trying to keep an inventory of items with a variety of styles, sizes, and colors was not practical—not to mention the additional work required of the volunteers handling the inventory, collecting payments, and shipping orders.

A company was found with the ability to digitize the USIHC logo so that it can be embroidered onto a wide selection of items. The company directly handles all inventory and orders, relieving USIHC volunteers of that duty. The tab for branded clothing provides links that will take you directly to the website and catalogs for this company. Please note that there is no partnership between this company and any of the USIHC Board members or any of the general members, nor does the USIHC, any Board or general members receive any financial compensation from the clothing company. The USIHC also does not provide any compensation, financial or otherwise, to the company.

## CONTACT US

This is the final section of the website tour and this tab is truly an important one, as it gives both members and the general public a quick and easy way to communicate with the USIHC.

The first three drop-down boxes, Registry, General Information, and Website Help, will automatically open up an email window when clicked, for ease in communicating with those respective divisions of USIHC. This eliminates the need to open other windows, or search for email addresses.

The final drop-down box, Officers and Mailing Addresses, provides the names and email addresses of all of the USIHC officers, and also the postal addresses for the USIHC Treasurer and Registrar. All email addresses are hyperlinks that will again automatically open up an email window to the chosen officer when the hyperlink is clicked.

I hope that this series of articles about navigating the USIHC website was useful. Thanks to webmaster Doug Smith, the USIHC website is very user-friendly, especially with all of the hyperlinks to take a person directly to other webpages without having to open new windows. Thanks to the contributions of members, the USIHC website is also beautiful, as it is filled with incredible photographs of our treasured and beloved breed.

I can't encourage members enough to take advantage of the wealth of information that the USIHC website makes available in a click.

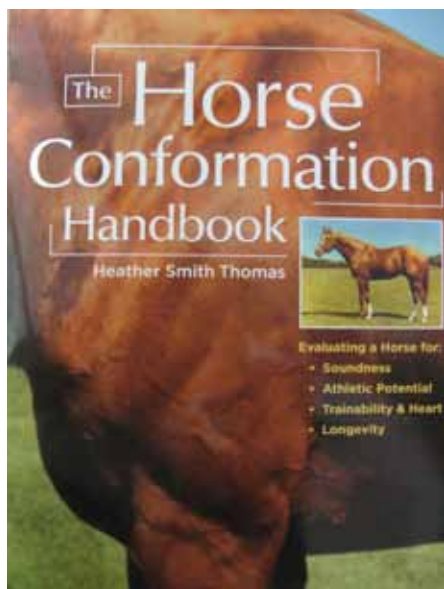
## CARTOONS BY C. ROMANO





# THE HORSE CONFORMATION HANDBOOK

BOOK REVIEW BY BERNIE WILLIS



It's time for a confession. The books I've been reviewing in the *Icelandic Horse Quarterly* have been my choice and closely follow my interests. Teaching riding, and training Icelandic horses, are very important to me, and there is a closely related experience that ties into this. Once a student has mastered the basics of riding they often want a horse of their own. It makes sense for them to ask their instructor for advice. This request opens up a new realm of information, with many opportunities for excitement and disappointment.

How does a casual rider learn to assess a horse? The USIHC breeding shows and young horse evaluations are educational and fun but they don't address the fundamentals. I have been to most of them and sat with the judges, as well as having attended the breeding judge seminars at Holar in Iceland several times. The real value of a breeding show is perceived by a very knowledgeable person. Most of the spectators are simply awed by the performance of these great horses. They don't see them the way the judges do.

## GOOD LEGS

To understand how to interpret the scores at a breeding show, you need to know exactly what the judges are looking for and how much each individual score, of the 20 things judged, contributes to the overall score. For instance, there is a 60/40 percent weighting on performance vs. conformation. A horse with rather bad legs may score very high in performance; that will shift its total score upward. But having a high overall score does not mean that this horse will make a good long-lived trail horse. An analysis of the horse's individual scores for leg quality, and the judges' comments, will show this. A person who knows what really good legs are supposed to look like won't be fooled. But how do you learn, in the first place, what makes really good, strong legs?

This spring one of my riding students found the "perfect" horse for her. It was pretty, it tolled, it was young and gentle, the son of a friend's horse, it was in her price range—would I go and check it out since I was traveling in the area where it lived? Of course I'd go have a look and am I ever glad I did. The first step it took out of the stall caught my attention.

It waddled like a duck! The whole rear end swung back and forth with each step. There was no alternating up-and-down movement of the hips as it walked. What was it doing and why and what difference did it make? It was time to put aside books on training and study conformation and movement. My mentor took a look at the waddling horse and recommended *The Horse Conformation Handbook* by Heather Smith Thomas.

## THE WHY QUESTIONS

*The Horse Conformation Handbook* was published by Storey Publishing in 2005. It is a large-format book of 387 pages, available from Amazon.com and other booksellers for \$25.95. The book is divided into three main sections: anatomy and principles of conformation, evaluating a horse, and appendices. The book holds your interest

because it answers the "why" questions. Something isn't good because it looks nice but because it works well when related to this and that. Our own body structure is related to the horse's structure in a way that helps us understand how parts work together.

As an Icelandic horse owner, I was drawn to the question, What height is ideal? "Big is not always better," an adage states. "A good little horse will beat a good big horse any day. A smaller horse is often better proportioned than a tall horse and therefore more agile and able to collect himself, making him more maneuverable for fast work." Further on is the statement that, "too many poor bodies contribute to the breakdown of good legs." Proportions and angles are important as well as good hooves and legs.

What are these proportions? How do we figure out the angles? There are sections in the book about different types of horses for different purposes. The question of what allows a gaited horse to achieve its unique movements is addressed. The four basics for selection—soundness, athletic potential, trainability, and longevity—apply to all breeds and riding disciplines.

The book concludes with a section on applying what you've learned and developing a eye for seeing what a horse really is. It's much more than a beauty contest.

The duck-waddler didn't find a new home. But the riding student did find a nice and affordable horse and now understands the adage, "Pretty is as pretty does."

# HNYKILL'S HUNTER PACE

BY REGINA BERRISH

**G**óðan Daginn! It is a beautiful morning here at Tolt Farm in New Jersey, and I thought I would greet you all by saying, “Good Morning” in the language of my homeland—Iceland. You all know me. I’m Hnykill, and you met me in a prior issue of the *Quarterly*. Regina promised she would let you know what lessons I planned to teach her next, but I thought I would give you the story myself, straight from the horse’s mouth.

I shudder when I remember those days shortly after arriving from Iceland. Regina spelled it all out for you in her article, and it’s all true. I was only seven years old, and I thought my happy life was over. I thought life was always going to be filled with the indignities of not only having to stand still in an upside down bridle while the herd stared at me. I also had to accept that I was owned by a person who didn’t even know what her own horse looked like! I longed to be back in Iceland herding sheep. You can see why I had to take matters into my own hooves. Oh, the miles we have traveled together since then, and how far we have come.

I’m happy to tell you that after several months of toltolting our way over hills and through streams and fields with Anne Owen at our side (my trainer here at Tolt Farm), I decided Regina was ready for her first Trail Pace. At first, she didn’t want to do it. I convinced her that she was ready, and that I would carry her safely over the course set for the pace. I thought Regina might be a bit nervous, so I took her on a few practice runs that week. I love to tolt, and I’m really good at it. I even won a blue ribbon for my maiden tolt the very first time I entered a show ring at Dillsburg when I first came to this country. I knew we would have no trouble toltolting our way over this course.

## TOO FAST!

The day arrived, and I was very excited. It had rained heavily the day before, so I remembered to shake the frogs in all four hooves which allowed me to grip



Hnykill has been winning ribbons in Hunter Pace for his owner Regina Berrish.

the ground nicely as I ran. I don’t wear shoes, you see, so I can get a good grip. I lowered my head, twitched my ears, then pointed them both forward. What fun! We were given our numbers, and the clocker said, “Go!” Off we went. We were part of the largest group of entries that day.

I started with a fast walk and went quickly into tolt at Regina’s asking. Here I thought she would be nervous—no sign of that now! Instead, I started to worry about the pace we were setting. Faster and faster we went, and I could hear her laughter echoing through the woods. Horses have great instincts about certain things, and I knew we were going too fast for this trail pace. I tried to slow us down a bit by running so close to a bush that she got soaking wet. This only made her laugh more, so what was I supposed to do? I just shrugged and did what she told me. The most important thing was that we both were having a great time.

Before I knew it, I poked my head over an incline, and there waiting for us was the clocker. We did it! Regina was still laughing. She hopped off, gave me a hug, dug into her pocket for a treat for me, and said, “Thank you, Nik. It was the best ever.” I felt so good for having done my job well. Regina won her first ribbon that day—a bright yellow for third place. (Since then, we’ve won a red, as you’ll see in the photo.) If she had listened to me, it could have been blue. We were 20 minutes too fast.

Regina is so proud of that yellow ribbon that she hung it over my portrait. She learned that day that together, we can do just about anything. We have become a wonderful team, and I wouldn’t trade my life here for all the sheep in Iceland. I learned something too that day: *The joy of the journey is in the ride.* Ribbon or no ribbon, it’s the joy that really counts.



# RATTLER BITE

BY CHRIS ROMANO

Rattlesnakes rarely bite horses, but a rattlesnake did strike our Icelandic, right above his left nostril. It was during the first warm spell in early April. We didn't see it happen, but heard his whinny around noon. It was odd to hear him whinny, so I checked him all over, saw nothing. He did tilt his head at me. When I checked his rump for ticks, he backed up against me, and we walked quickly backwards about 15 feet. It was odd, but I couldn't see or find anything. What Fudgy might have been saying is, "Hey lady, look at this spot on my nose. I got bit by something. I couldn't back up fast enough!"

The husband and I went out for an appointment. When we came back, three hours later, he saw Fudgy's head was swollen, called me over, and pointed to a big gap between Fudgy's teeth and distended upper and lower lips. I saw the swelling and started to cry and keel; I thought he would die. Was this tetanus, a break from a kick? Slowly, it dawned on me, this may be a rattlesnake bite. We live next to Edgewood Park, prime rattler habitat, and we see one or two a year. The horses have never been bothered, but perhaps this bite was from a baby rattler?

We are very fortunate to have some wonderful veterinarians in the San Francisco Bay area. In less than an hour our vet, Dr. Wohlfred, pulled up. His normal friendly warm smile was gone when he looked at the Icelandic. Fudgy's face was too swollen for a halter, so we looped a lead line over his neck, so the doctor could treat him. Fudgy's breath was strangled and raspy. The doctor showed us the bite site, right above the nostril, where a drop of blood-tinged serum oozed.

Dr. Wohlfred gave Fudgy several injections, including two antibiotics: Bacteria from the snake's fangs, not venom, was the big danger. Facial and nasal swelling could completely constrict his airflow, so the doctor gave Fudgy a shot of steroids to control the swelling. He added an NSAID to combat the inflammation and pain. Usually a vet won't give steroids at the same time as NSAIDs. A side effect



Fudgy's face before he met the rattler.

of that combination is almost always a gastric ulcer. But this was not a usual circumstance.

Our vet said he would come any time that night if Fudgy's breathing was much worse. He didn't want me to hesitate in calling; he might have to perform a tracheotomy. Fudgy made it through the night, and seemed to appreciate our frequent check-ins. When the doctor arrived the next morning Fudgy's whole face was swollen tight, with eyes completely shut. His head looked like a hippo's. His breathing was still labored, but he could drink water. There were little blood-tinged serum drips coming from the bite-side tear duct and nostril. His lips were stiff like an open parrot's beak. Swelling could cause his facial skin to crack open, so lotion was applied. I made a gruel out of water and pellets for the diuretic medication packets, but he really couldn't eat. Fudgy's tongue was working, but he couldn't get the mush down. We switched to mouth syringe application for medication, which seemed, to Fudgy, like adding insult to injury. He gave me that stoic martyred look—an Icelandic horse's specialty.

Every day our horses have visits from neighborhood families. How concerned and upset they were to see Fudgy's swollen face! Friends and family members called for updates. Their loving concern

was greatly appreciated. The children ask if Fudgy is okay, even now. Several horse friends told of their experiences when horses were bitten by rattlers. Trainer Laura Benson told of one Icelandic who was struck on two different occasions!

For three days Dr. Wohlfred came twice a day. It was essential to keep infection down by giving strong antibiotic injections twice a day. By the third day Fudgy's breathing was much better; his movements were perky and he was able to graze a little. After a couple more days, I could give him his medications in gruel rather than by mouth syringe. It was a week before he could struggle to crunch small bits of carrots. The swelling slowly diminished over the next couple of weeks.

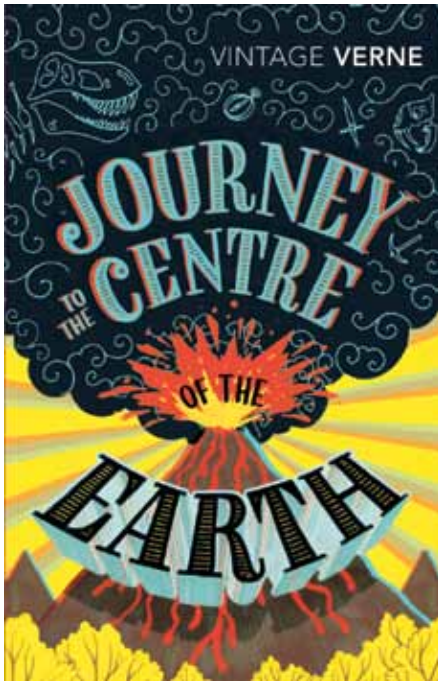
In closing, recent studies show no appreciable difference between horses given anti-venom and horses not given anti-venom treatments. So antibiotics are the main treatment. As a precaution the reader might want to keep a breathing tube in their med kit. That way, if your horse is bitten and is having trouble breathing, you can make sure one nasal airway remains open while you wait for your vet to arrive. Ask your vet what tube to use and how it's to be inserted.



The rattlesnake bite caused Fudgy's face to swell to dangerous proportions.

# JULES VERNE AND THE ICELANDIC HORSE

BY PAMELA S. NOLF



A reprint of Jules Verne's classic, first published in 1864.

During random Internet surfing, I discovered the website for Icelandic Mountain Horses, owned by Sharon and Garry Snook. Their site features the following intriguing quote from *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*, published by Jules Verne in 1864:

*"I begin to think no animal is more intelligent than an Icelandic horse. Snow, tempest, impracticable roads, rocks, icebergs—nothing stops him. He is brave; he is sober; he is safe; he never makes a false step, never glides nor slips from his path."*

How did Jules Verne get to know Icelandic horses so well, I wondered? Having come across the quote, I just had to research how Verne came up with such an appealing description of our fascinating horses.

To start, I re-read *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*. The novel begins with Harry, the unwilling and not very brave protagonist of the novel, living with his uncle, Professor Hardwigg, in Hamburg, Germany. The Professor, an expert in

mineralogy and geology, finds an old manuscript written by Arne Saknussemm, a learned Icelandic scholar and alchemist in the 1500s. The manuscript is written in code in the old runic alphabet of Iceland. Harry and the Professor experience a great deal of frustration trying to decipher this document.

If you have ever struggled to type the names of Icelandic horses in the Icelandic alphabet (which adds three runic letters to the Latin alphabet) using the modern letters on an English keyboard, you will have a sense of the difficulty the heroes faced. As Harry laments, "Now I had a strong conviction that the runic alphabet and dialect were simply an invention to mystify poor human nature" (Verne, 1993 ed., p. 436). Harry and Professor Hardwigg finally decode the manuscript after trying the old words-are-spelled-backwards stratagem.

The mysterious manuscript reveals that the Icelander Arne Saknussemm found an entrance to the center of the Earth through the crater of the extinct volcano Mount Sneffels (modern Snaefellsjökull) in Iceland. Harry argues that "All scientific teaching, theoretical and practical, shows it to be impossible" (Verne, 1993 ed., p. 453) since scientists believe that the center of the Earth is molten. The Professor cares nothing for theories and responds that "the only way to learn is, like Arne Saknussemm, to go and see" (Verne, 1993 ed., p. 454). (After all, why should a little science ever get in the way of a good science fiction story?) So the Professor organizes an expedition to Iceland—which Harry reluctantly accompanies.

## ICELANDIC LIFE

Verne succinctly describes their journey from Hamburg to Copenhagen to Reykjavik (Verne's spelling). Surprisingly, almost one fourth of the novel focuses on their journey through Iceland to Mount Sneffels. One of the more amusing stories involves Professor Hardwigg visiting the public library in Reykjavik to search for

additional works by Arne Saknussemm. The Professor is flummoxed to find mostly empty shelves and points out the lack of books to his local host Mr. Fridriksson, who cheerfully explains that the library contains 8,000 volumes. When the Professor asks where they are, Mr. Fridriksson elucidates: "Scattered over the country, Professor Hardwigg. We are very studious, my dear sir, though we do live in Iceland. Every farmer, every laborer, every fisherman can both read and write—and we think that books instead of being locked up in cupboards, far from the sight of students, should be distributed as widely as possible. The books of our library are, therefore, passed from hand to hand without returning to the library shelves perhaps for years" (Verne, 1993 ed., p. 468). Travelers visiting Iceland in the nineteenth century frequently remarked on the high literacy rate in Iceland.

Verne spends a considerable amount of time describing aspects of Icelandic life



A fancy traveler on horseback in Iceland in 1908. From *Peeps at Many Lands: Iceland* by Mrs. Disney Leith.



such as the native costumes of Iceland, a walking tour of the streets of Reykjavik, and the importance of harvesting eider duck feathers to the local economy. It was after his detailed description of lunch at a farmhouse which included lichen soup, fish served with sour butter, biscuits, juniper berry juice, and “skyr,” a type of yogurt, that I began to suspect that Jules Verne had to have traveled in Iceland extensively. Let’s face it, you have to be born in Iceland or have visited Iceland or know a homesick Islander to know about “skyr.”

## EDMOND’S VOYAGE

So how did Jules Verne become acquainted with this level of detail of life in Iceland? Further research shows that Verne, a Frenchman, traveled extensively—to Great Britain, Scotland, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Portugal, Gibraltar, Italy, Ireland, United States, Germany, Algiers, and other countries (Perez, de Vries, and Margot, n.d.). He never made it to Iceland.

Dr. Delahoyde (2011), a professor at Washington State University, explains that Verne read an account of an expedition to the North Sea, including a visit to Iceland, published by Charles Edmond, a Polish author who wrote in French. Edmond was commissioned by Prince Napoleon to explore the North Sea. He wrote an account

of his travels in *Voyage dans les Mers du Nord à bord de la Corvette la Reine Hortense*, published in 1857. (This book is available in the original French via the online collection of the HathiTrust Digital Library.) Many of the names of Icelandic people mentioned in Verne’s novel are the names of real people borrowed from Edmond’s account.

As Delahoyde explains, if there are differences in spelling of names it is more because Verne could not read his own handwriting from the notes he had taken than from any attempt to disguise the names. In fact, my research shows that Verne’s passage about the movable library in Reykjavik is a conversational retelling of a passage about the “scandale parmi les bibliomanes” or “scandal among booklovers” from Edmond’s (1857, p. 97) treatise.

## THE HORSES

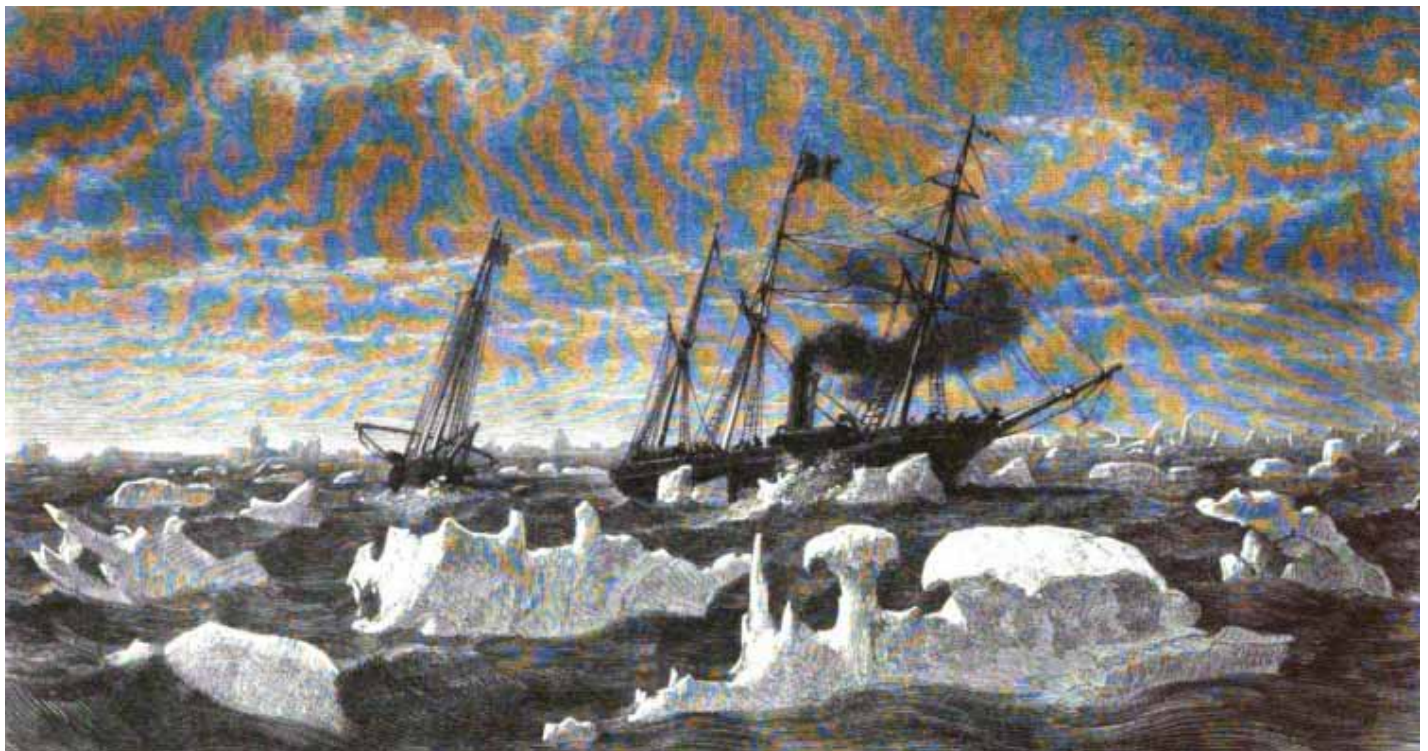
Back to the story, Harry and Professor Hardwigg hire Icelandic horses and a native guide, Hans, to travel from Reykjavik to Mount Sneffels. The Professor and Hans communicate in Danish since Iceland is a Danish colony at the time. During the trip the group, like all of Iceland at the time, relies heavily on their Icelandic horses for riding and transportation of goods. Verne

(1993 ed.) waxes rapturous about the virtues of these animals:

*Every now and then a spur of rock came down through the arid ground, leaving us scarcely room to pass. Our horses, however, appeared not only well acquainted with the country, but by a kind of instinct, knew which was the best road. My uncle had not even the satisfaction of urging forward his steed by whip, spur, or voice. It was utterly useless to show any signs of impatience. I could not help smiling to see him look so big on his little horse; his long legs now and then touching the ground made him look like a six-footed centaur.*

*“Good beast, good beast,” he would cry. “I assure you, Henry, that I begin to think no animal is more intelligent than an Icelandic horse. Snow, tempest, impractical roads, rocks, icebergs—nothing stops him. He is brave; he is sober; he is safe; he never makes a false step; never glides or slips from his path. I dare to say that if any river, any fjord has to be crossed—and I have no doubt there will be many—you will see him enter the water without hesitation like an amphibious animal, and reach the opposite side in safety. We must not, however, attempt to hurry him; we must allow him to have his own way, and I will undertake to say that between us we shall do our ten leagues a day.”* (pp. 482-483)

Certainly, these are sentiments with which contemporary tourists who go horse



The ship the Polish author and explorer Charles Edmond took on his travels in 1857. Jules Verne “borrowed” many details about Iceland from Edmond’s adventures. Engraving from *Voyage dans les Mers du Nord* by Charles Edmond.



A tourist sets off from Reykjavik in this 1911 photo by Magnus Olafsson. Courtesy of Cornell University Library.



How hay was carried in Iceland in the old days. Photo by Magnus Olafsson from 1911. Courtesy of Cornell University Library.



An Icelandic mailman from 1911. Photo by Magnus Olafsson, courtesy of Cornell University Library.

trekking in Iceland would agree. So where did Verne get his knowledge about the Icelandic horse? Charles Edmond also deeply appreciated “le cheval islandais” (pp. 111-112). With the help of an online translator and my college French, I have attempted to translate:

*Icelandic horses are small, but hardy; they are, in addition, endowed with of all the qualities needed to cope with the fantastical terrain of their homeland. When faced with a river, since no bridges exist in Iceland nor, for the same reason, does Iceland have thoroughfares or carriages, the horse, nostrils flaring as if in a race, throws itself into the water and swims across. When it is necessary to climb a mountain, the Icelandic horse scrambles through the lava fields; it picks its way through the loose rocks; it finds firm footing through the marsh. After descending to the plain, the horse resumes his ambling step, which is as fast as our post horses. Powerfully built, it is more intelligent than man in doing his job. During dangerous passages, the horse resists the rider if he gives an ill-advised command; the horse follows his instincts because his instincts are true.*

## THE FERRY

Like good writers throughout history, Jules Verne (1993 ed.) can take such sketchy source material and make it come to life as shown in the following vignette:

*Now, whatever may have been the intelligence of our horses, I had not the slightest reliance upon them, as a means of crossing a stormy arm of the sea. To ride over salt water upon the back of a little horse seemed to be absurd. “If they are really intelligent,” I said to myself, “they will certainly not make the attempt. In any case, I shall trust rather to my own intelligence than theirs.”*

*But my uncle was in no humor to wait. He dug his heels into the sides of his steed, and made for the shore. His horse went to the very edge of the water, sniffed at the approaching*

*wave and retreated. My uncle, who was, sooth to say, quite as obstinate as the beast he bestrode, insisted on him making the desired advance. This attempt was followed by a new refusal on the part of the horse which quietly shook his head. This demonstration of rebellion was followed by a volley of words and a stout application of whipcord; also followed by kicks on the part of the horse, which threw its head and heels upwards and tried to throw his rider. At length the sturdy little pony, spreading out his legs, in a stiff and ludicrous attitude, got under the Professor’s legs, and left him standing, with both feet on a separate stone, like the Colossus of Rhodes.*

*“Wretched animal!” cried my uncle, suddenly transformed into a foot passenger—and as angry and ashamed as a dismounted cavalry officer on the field of battle. (pp. 485-486)*

The Icelandic guide Hans ends the Professor’s tirade with two words: “farja” and “tidvatten” or ferry and tide. The horses know that the tide is too high—the Professor is not so intelligent. The explorers and horses cross the fjord on the ferry and the journey continues. The horses are soon left at a local farm since they will not be able to ascend Mount Sneffels. At this point in the novel, I am going to end my review of the plot with the disappearance of the Icelandic horses from the narrative. The reader would be well rewarded to take up the novel and follow Harry and Professor Hardwigg’s continued journey to the center of the earth.

Did Jules Verne ever encounter an Icelandic horse? Probably not. Jules Verne never made it to Iceland and my limited research failed to find any evidence that he ever rode an Icelandic horse. (There is always a possibility that he encountered Icelandic horses in some of the Scandinavian countries he visited.) Even so, Jules Verne manages to transmute the somewhat stark, dry descriptions provided by Edmond and

create a charming portrait of these small horses with big personalities. Those of us who work with Icelandic horses know how intelligent, brave, sober, safe, stubborn, and, oh so, entertaining they can be. Verne was a master of imagination and visualization, so it is easy to see why Hollywood has made four films based on *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*. However, I do wish that the screenwriters would stop cutting the Icelandic horses from the script.

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Many thanks to Sharon and Garry Snook who gave me permission to refer to their website located at <http://www.icelandic-mountainhorses.com/>

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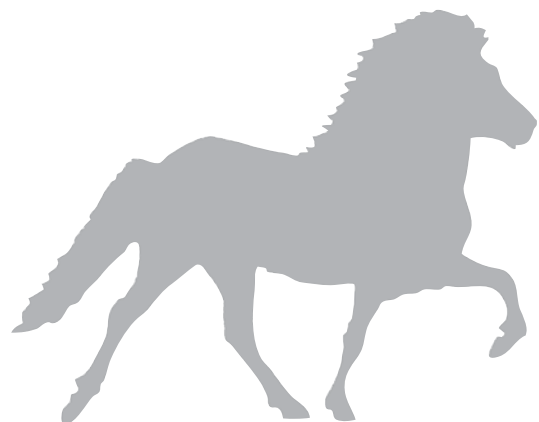


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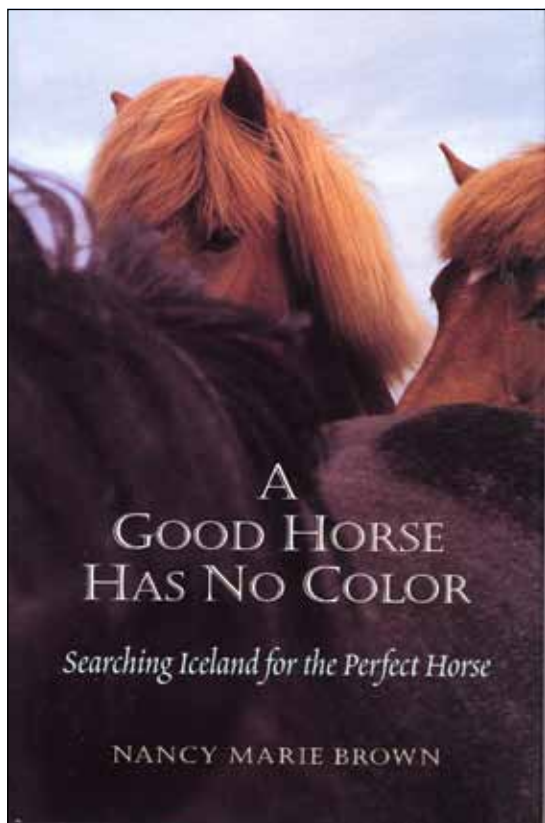
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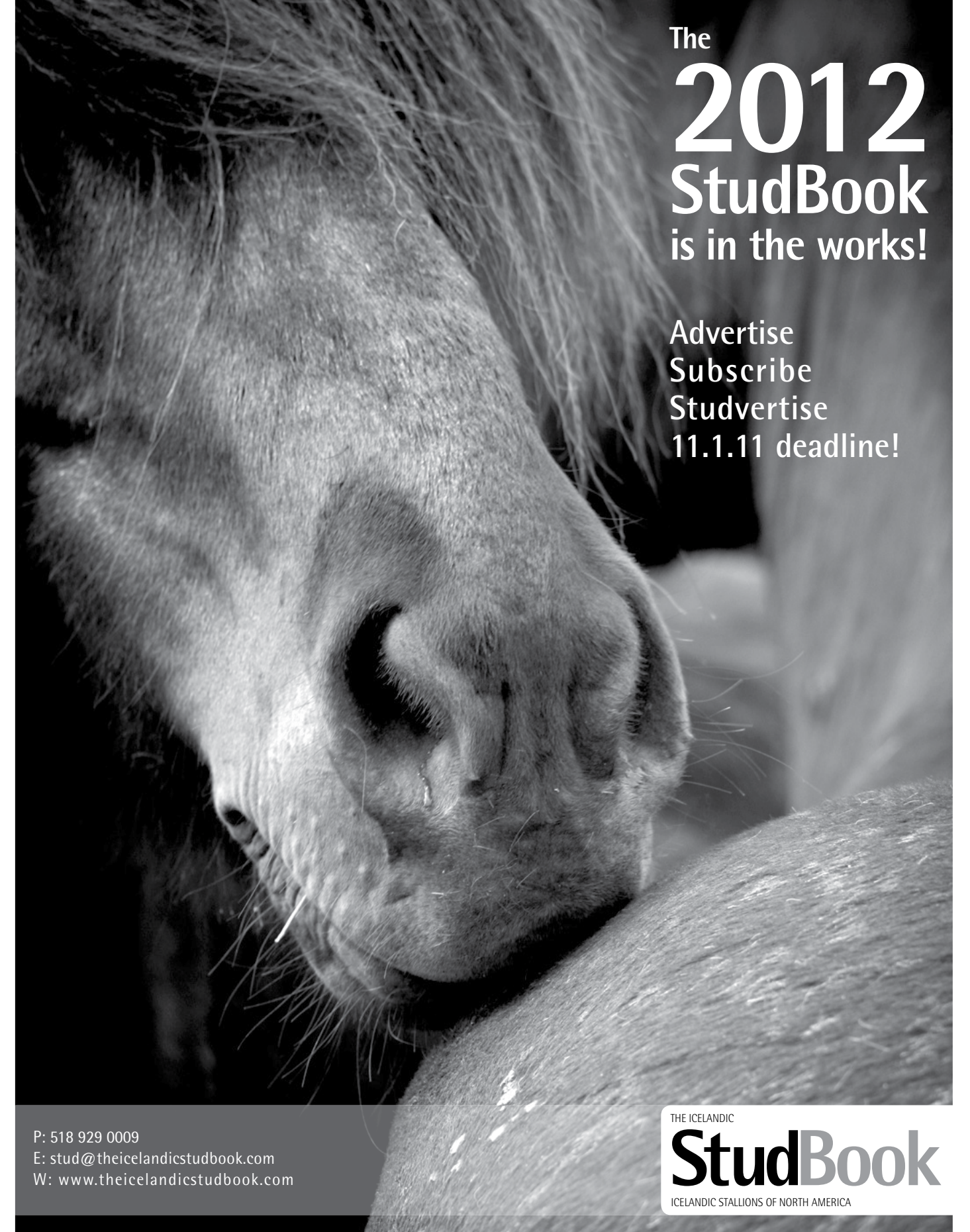
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