

Illustrated Hoof Care for Horses

NOTE: The author is Melvin Bradley, Professor Emeritus, Department of Animal Science, University of Missouri. This series of bulletins is reprinted for Michigan use through courtesy of the University of Missouri—Richard Dunn, Extension Specialist in Animal Husbandry, Michigan State University.

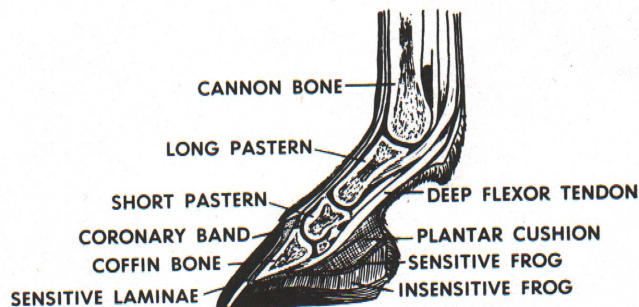
The old adage, "No foot, no horse" is as true as it ever was. The feet of most horses require attention every 4 to 6 weeks if they are to be maintained in proper condition. Failure to do so results in broken hoofs, crooked limbs, quarter cracks, dried out feet, and diseases. Colts and growing horses should receive special attention in order to maintain straight legs during periods of rapid leg-bone growth.

Keep feet trimmed straight so they maintain proper shape, length, and angle. Clean feet daily when kept in stalls and prevent excessive drying out by packing in damp clay once or twice weekly if needed. Keep stalls clean and dry to reduce thrush and other filth problems.

A colt should be taught to yield its feet when 3-6 months of age. After the colt has learned to lead, start handling his legs according to the procedures illustrated until he ceases to resist. Work quietly and patiently during the learning process. If he resists, release his foot, settle him down, and repeat the process. Adult horses can be handled in the same manner, but with more care. Some may require twitching. Watch the head and ears and general muscular tenseness to determine how fast to proceed.

Handling the front feet safely

Stand the horse squarely on his feet on level ground and proceed as illustrated.



WHITE LINE
Figure 1: Internal structure, foot and pastern

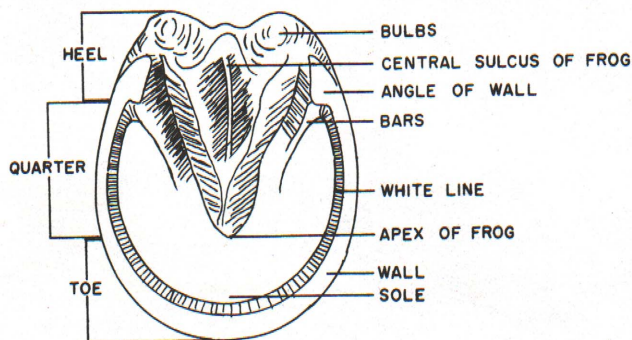


Figure 2: External structure, foot.



Figure 3: Address the horse and work the hand down his front leg. Brace against shoulder with left hand.



Figure 4: Grasp the cannon gently and push against his shoulder with your shoulder and left hand to shift his weight.



Figure 5: Raise foot and step over cannon or pass hoof behind left knee.

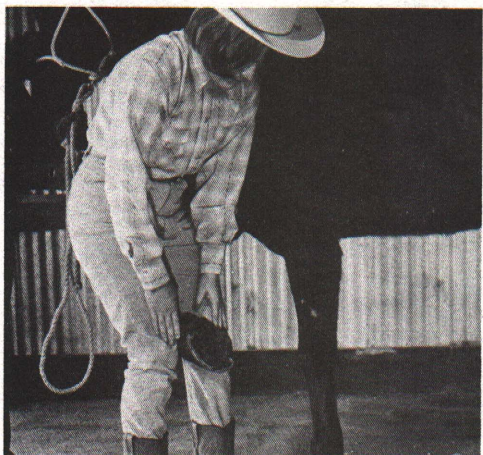


Figure 6: Assume this position with hoof firmly held between knees, hands free.

Handling the hind feet safely

More danger is incurred in handling hind feet than front feet and more resistance is usually encountered from the horse. Proceed as illustrated—without hurrying.

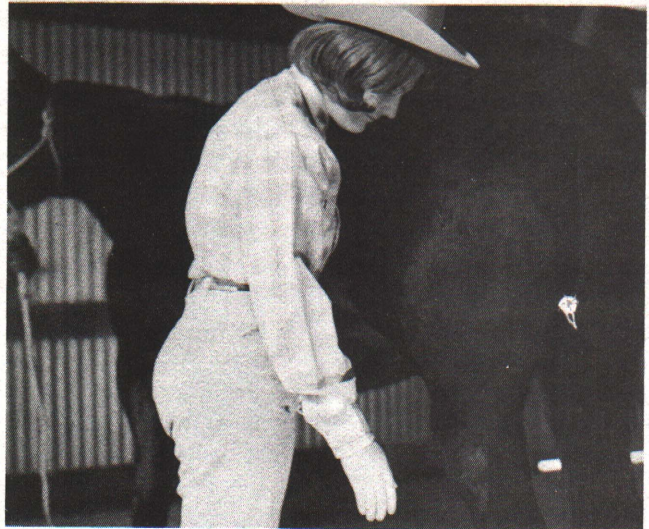


Figure 7: Approach quietly, close to horse. Brace against his hip with your left hand and prepare to work down leg with right.

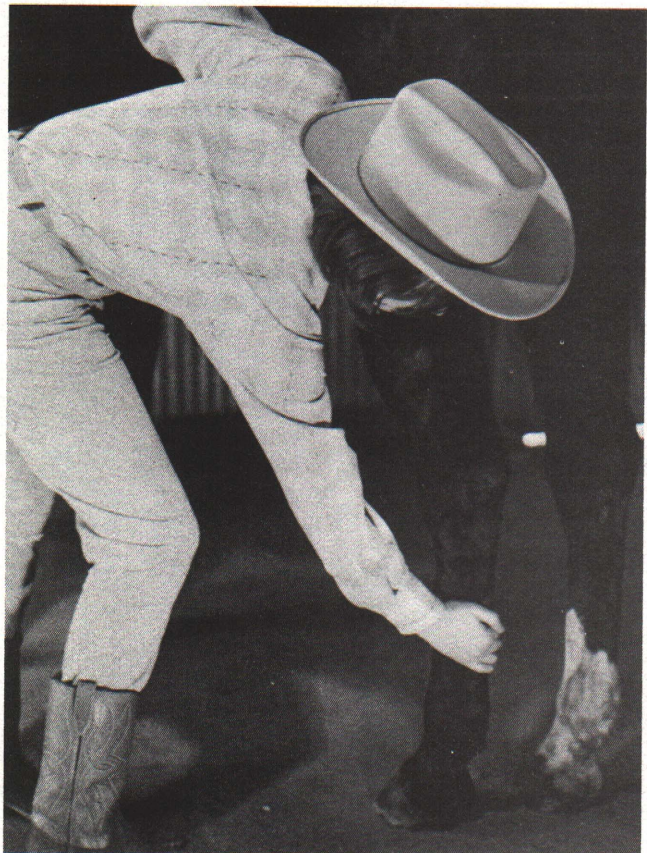


Figure 8: Pull forward and up, left hand braced on hip for protection and pressure in shifting his weight.



Figure 9: Raise foot to appropriate height without overbalancing horse.



Figure 11: Position hock under armpit, fetlock in lap, hands free. Keep horse balanced.



Figure 10: Step under the leg, hand still on hip.

Trimming the feet

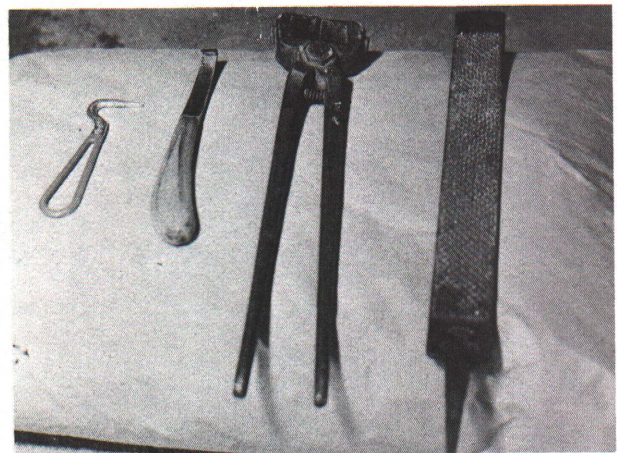


Figure 12: Essential tools: 1. Hoof pick for cleaning. 2. Hoof knife for exploring, trimming, and identifying juncture of sole and wall. 3. Nippers for cutting down horny wall. 4. Rasp for leveling and smoothing.

A few tools are needed for care and trimming feet. Hoof trimming of gentle horses with reasonably straight feet can be done successfully by most amateurs. Corrective trimming should be left to professionals. Your goal is to remove the wall to the

level of the sole uniformly around the hoof. To accomplish this, locate the juncture of sole and wall with the hoof knife (Figure 14). Since the sole may not be level, exercise judgment in using the nippers.

Two types of nippers are available. One has two cutting jaws and the other one has one cutting jaw. The former is usually preferred when only one kind is used. Jaws that rest flat on the sole when in the cutting position are easier to maintain on a straight course in going around the hoof contrasted to oval-shaped jaws. Note the "square" appearance of the jaws in Figure 12. In any case, *keep them sharp*.

Amateurs tend to remove too little hoof with the nippers leaving too much for the rasp. This is all right but requires more work.

Loose portions of the sole and frog may be removed with the knife but these should be trimmed sparingly if at all. Horseshoers usually use the knife for final leveling.



Figure 13: Clean frog with a downward stroke of hoof pick.



Figure 14: Locate white line and juncture of sole and wall by trimming with rounded end of knife.



Figure 15: Remove wall in a single piece to level of sole with jaw of nippers flat on sole. Do not cut shorter than level of sole.



Figure 16: Rasp wall level with sole by including heel in downward stroke using coarse side of rasp. Do not rasp frog. Let foot down and check for levelness and 45-50° angle.



Figure 17: When wall is removed and foot is level, round edges with fine side of rasp.

Hoof care hints

- Begin when foal is only a few months old.
- Keep feet well rounded.
- Exercise foals on dry ground to allow natural wear.
- If kept in stall, rasp down every 2 to 3 weeks.
- Clean soles and clefts of frog frequently.
- Do not pare out sole, just clean.
- Do not trim away healthy frog unless there is clearly an excess.
- Keep foot straight with angle of short pastern.
- Hoof-to-ground angles should be about 45°.
- Rasp sharp edge of hoof wall to make bearing surface approximately true thickness of wall.
- Do not rasp outside wall.
- Rasp in such a manner that the heel is included in each stroke.