

BAREFOOT myths

By David Farmilo (Accredited Master Farrier) Oakbank SA

I have just come back from Sport Horse Expo in WA, followed by Equitana in Melbourne. After seeing some of the demonstrations at both places, and checking out the qualifications of some of the 'educators' and then coming home to a backlog of emails from horse owners clamouring for enlightenment on what is right and what is wrong, I have decided that for this article I am taking a rest and will assemble some quotes.

The following extracts are taken from my Bible, 'The Principles of Horseshoeing' written by Dr Doug Butler and Jacob Butler. My Bible (P3 Edition 2004) is 1,000 pages of technical information about horses' hooves. Dr Doug Butler has a PhD from Cornell University, is a Certified Journeyman Farrier from the American Farrier's Association and was the first American Fellow of the Worshipful Company of Farriers of England. He has taught farrier science for more than 40 years at universities, schools, clinics, seminars, conferences and conventions.

To quote Dr Butler:

The HOOF WALL bears most of the horse's weight, resists wear and trauma, and cuts into the ground to provide traction. The thick laminated sides of the hoof tubules are primarily responsible for the hoof's strength, elasticity and resistance to wear. Each tubule has the ability to bend or flex slightly and to compress slightly. The function of hoof tubules can be compared to the damper action of a hydraulic shock absorber located within a coil spring (somewhat like the suspension system on the front end of a car). The hoof is designed to bear weight. The hoof tubules have a spiral columnar structure that makes them resistant to compression and flexion. (Now my Bible gets a bit technical here, but do bear with me). The laminar attachment of hoof to bone suspends the skeleton and weight of the body from the hoof wall. The laminae redirect the forces acting on them and dissipate the concussion coming up from the ground and down from the body.

The SOLE is not designed to bear weight. It protects the coffin bone, and its cupped shape helps with traction in soft ground. The sole exfoliates when it reaches a thickness of about ¼". The thickness of the sole is important because it protects the coffin bone from injury and fracture due to sharp projections and uneven surfaces encountered by the horse. The sole is normally arched and can support

some weight at its edges. However, its function is primarily protective.

The FROG is a pad or a cushion, a traction device and a scent gland. The frog's consistency and shape allows it to function as an anti-concussion and non-slipping device. The frog normally sheds as a unit at least twice a year. The horse's foot may be tender shortly thereafter. The frog in its normal state absorbs concussion from two directions. The frog acts like a rubber shock absorber of concussion force from the ground.

That is the reading from my Bible for today.

Now, let me quote from an email that was sent to me citing a local forum on barefoot trimming. (Incidentally, a horse with no shoes is barefoot, and all horses have to be trimmed whether barefoot or shod. People were starting to realise this. For 200 years the Australian Stockmen have been taking shoes off their horses to give the hooves a necessary rest, without them going lame, and furthermore they have been able to shoe them the following week if needed unexpectedly for a muster or an endurance ride. So now the barefoot enthusiasts have re-invented a 'barefoot trim as compared with a farrier trim'. In the old days the circuses did this with smoke and mirrors).

To Quote from the email which was written by a named "Barefoot Trimmer":

With a proper barefoot trim, if you stand the horse on a concrete slab the quarters will be rebated. Barefoot trimmers use the sole as a landmark for trimming. This is taken from the wild horse model. The reason being that when the horse is standing still on its hoof, the hoof is not under pressure. When the hoof is under pressure, at a trot or canter, or gallop, the hoof flexes and the wall at the quarter WILL be in contact with the ground. Also, generally barefoot trimmers take the heels down further than farriers (not always, but in general). And of course **a barefoot trimmer will be working with a view to getting the horse to walk on its frog and sole**. A farrier gets the horse to walk on the walls of its hooves and that principal is generally (not always, but generally) applied to the farrier's trim. What is wrong with a horse walking on its hoof walls...you ask? Well for a start **Hoof walls were never designed to be walked on and they are nowhere near strong enough**. If you want to see this for yourself, just take a rasp to a hoof wall. A couple of rasp runs and the wall



is worn down. OK. Now take your rasp and rasp the frog. You might leave a small rasp mark but I bet you won't be able to actually rasp the frog back. No. Its made of weird stuff and is inherently stronger than the hoof wall.

Another quote from the same forum (but from a different person) was:

One more thing. Farrier trims usually cost about \$25. A barefoot trimmer usually charges more. I charge \$44 locally (including GST) and \$50 (incl GST) if I have to travel more than 25kms. I do discounts for two or more horses in the one location.

My final quote is from my own website, from an article I posted over a year ago.

Barefoot trimming is the latest fashion. Ask yourself **why?**

Who are the people teaching at these courses?

Ask the person teaching at the course how many horses they have trimmed.

Ask them what their qualifications are, and if you can sight the documents.

Ask then how long they have been trimming horses.

The same applies in choosing a farrier.

I run Hoof Care Courses myself and charge a lot for them. I offer money back now or later if participants feel they haven't had their money's worth. I have never been asked to pay out.

But I am not foolish enough to sell my principles of shoeing to disciples who can then go out and run courses on David Farmilo's ABC trimming and shoeing – there is only one me and I don't say that arrogantly. I just don't want anyone teaching my principles inaccurately or incorrectly. I run my own courses on my own principles – I have been shoeing horses for 50 years, and I do not believe someone can learn my principles or anyone else's and become a 'certified David Farmilo instructor' in ten weeks, two weeks or whatever. I am a mentor to many farriers, and I believe this is how knowledge should be handed on professionally. 🍷