

## WADI FARM WALERS:

### “Barefoot From Birth”

*By Katherine Waddington,  
Secretary of Outback Heritage Horse Association of WA*



The Outback Heritage Horse Association of Western Australia was formed in 2005 to help identify and rescue or relocate, if necessary, old bloodline heritage horses bred in remote, outback conditions in WA.

“Heritage” horses in the OHHA’s case are defined as a horse originating from outback or isolated country where horses have served past generations in many roles, where “modern” breeds have not been subsequently introduced since the early 1940’s, and DNA or reliable anecdotal evidence can back this up.



*Heritage horses running wild up near Wiluna, north-west*

Some of these horses are later identified as Walers, heritage Stock Horses, heritage draught horses, old bloodline station Thoroughbreds, etc.

As founding President Ian Lockyer puts it; “Our grandparents and great-grandparents depended on these horses for their survival; they are a part of our story, our history and our heritage. They have been an integral part of WA’s pastoral and grazing industry, our defence, exploration and

state development. The horses have special qualities of endurance, temperament, and hardiness and are unique in the world. We have a shared responsibility to ensure that their bloodlines are carried on.”

The Association’s membership includes dedicated and competent horsemen and women with the experience, equipment, horse sense and contacts to help secure the future of remount and other old bloodline heritage horses whose survival has been identified as being under threat.

The Association works in conjunction with government agencies, vets, station owners and other horse rescue organisations and individuals. It also works with the media for the purposes of promotion and education. New members are always welcome as are donations and general enquiries which can both be made through the website. Rescued heritage horses are sometimes available for sale.



That's the speel. The reality is a resurgence of interest in heritage bloodlines and a genuine concern for endangered horses on (mainly) once privately owned, now government or large company owned stations

where former military remount stock and other station horses have now been running free for generations and have come up against drought, mining companies, feral eradication programmes and other issues which are forcing them to the brink of extinction.

Some OHHA members are also AEBM members. Why? Because most heritage horse lovers are also lovers of one of their greatest attributes – their bare feet.

Why do heritage horses have such good hooves? Well, for a start, these are not your average nags. These are hardy, beautiful animals with fantastic conformation, kind eyes, calm temperaments and the ability to bond quickly with man, even from totally wild. They come in a variety of sizes, from pony to 16.3hh but they all have several characteristics in common:

- Their hardiness. They heal quickly when injured - we have yet to see proud flesh.

- Their ability to absorb protein. Lack of founder in the wild is a reality. Although not heritage horses as such, recently 200 Welsh Mountain ponies were identified living wild on Mundrabilla Station out near the Nullabor in Western Australia. These are highly susceptible types however due to their "wild horse lifestyle" (and they have bred wild on this station for generations), they are less likely to founder as not only have they been toughened by their environment, but their feet are



at all the correct angles, therefore reducing the chances of rotation. It is a two pronged sword – genetics and the natural condition – and we believe both elements are relevant. (200 ponies can't be wrong!) In the wild, it's feast or famine. If you can't process rich pasture quickly, or you founder when you do so, you die.

- Which leads us to their hooves. Big, wide frogs and low heels. That's the Australian "Wild Horse" hoof. Worn down by the rock on which most of them live. Most heritage horses have hooves that even mustangs would kill for. Hooves like iron. Hooves that – if managed and trimmed correctly – never even need boots, let alone horse shoes. And they pass these incredible genes onto their offspring.

No longer home-bred horses – heritage horses are natural selection at work. Created by man, perfected by nature.



My husband Kevin and I are also members of the Waler Horse Society of Australia. We started a stud in 2005, to breed Walers and heritage horses, because we not only believe in preserving old bloodlines but also in endeavouring to do everything naturally – no shoes, wild horse trims, sustainable farming and we practise Natural Horsemanship methods to train our horses. Why? Because it works, particularly with wild horses. They understand the “ground games” and they learn very quickly that we mean them no harm.

Most of the actual rescue work for the OHHA is undertaken by Dr Sheila Greenwell BVSc, a Margaret River veterinarian and equine specialist, and her small group of dedicated outback professionals. Sheila is an exceptional vet. She has also taken verbal advice and instruction from Hildrud Strasser and other barefoot specialists over the past few years and that, along with her

observations of wild horses and wild hooves, led her and my husband, Kevin Waddington, to refining their own trimming methods down to what they believe to be the correct “wild horse trim”. Again, lower the bars and lower that heel. Oh and never touch the moonsickle area. There’s a bit more too it of course, but that’s the basics and it works for us.

Long toes are not really a thing we see in the wild ones... the famous "mustang roll" evolved from the short toes of these horses.

Dr Sheila Greenwell hard at work on recently rescued heritage hooves – hard at work because their hooves are so hard!!

Vet Sheila has also applied these trimming methods to domestically bred horses with sometimes severe hoof problems – including one mare who foundered due to complications from losing a foal. *All* of her hoof capsules slothed off. But the mare was tough (an Arabian formerly used for endurance) and Sheila was dedicated. With daily trimming and bathing and



months of treatment, the mare not only walked again, she is now jumping and regularly attends Pony Club competitions and activities, as sound and healthy as ever.

## A wild horse trim success case – “Mary”

Of course every horse is different and every hoof is different. Training needs are different.



Some things work and some things don't. It's only when you talk to people openly and honestly that you learn something which may be of use. Communication is what it is all about. We are still learning but we are always happy to share our experiences.

So what else have we learned from the wild ones? Well, the big one – which we actually already knew – is that movement is important. These horses walk tens of kilometres every day from food to water and back again. They keep those hooves pumping. So we run our rescued heritage stock in larger

paddocks as much as possible – with good, hard ground. Rocks and gravel. We looked a long time to find a property with good pasture, good water and hard earth beneath and it has definitely paid off.

One of the surprising things we learnt is that Australian wild horses don't stick their hooves in water as much as some people might think. When observed drinking from dams and water holes up north of WA, many wild horses actually take great pains to keep their feet *out* of water. Perhaps it's the danger of being stuck in the mud. There is ground water, but only at certain times of the year. Some years. Wild horse hooves, on the whole, live a hard, dry existence.

Here on our green and water abundant property in Nannup, in south west WA, some of the formerly wild ones have learnt to not only walk in, but play in water now, which is lovely to watch. They paw and splash and have a ball.



Too much energy is required for simply surviving, and they don't waste it. However, once domesticated and fed up, these remarkable animals *learn* to play. They seem to delight in investigating new things and in teaching themselves games. The foals start to buck, kick and run. The older horses paw at logs and pick up sticks, or start mouthing their buckets and throwing them about. We have a two year old Waler filly (rescued when a yearling), who now takes great delight in picking up her empty rubber feed bucket and tossing it down into our main dam. She then stands there and watches it float out across the water, usually with my husband running around the edge of the dam after it.

Moving, eating and keeping their brains active. That's what's important to horses in a domestic situation.

We use our Walers and heritage horses for mustering, campdrafting, social endurance, bush riding and breeding. We are off in a couple of weeks on a 3 day social ride down near Pemberton, WA. Both of the horses we are taking will be Walers and neither of them will require boots. My husband's bay roan Waler gelding, caught wild on Clayton Station in South Australia as a 3 year old colt, has always maintained fantastically hard feet, despite a nasty (fence) injury when he was first brought to WA which resulted in wire cutting down into his hoof capsule past his coronet band. With Sheila's help and his own innate healing abilities, this very deep wound healed within two months.



Created by man, perfected by nature. Barefoot and natural is definitely the way to go.