

# Friesian Blood & Baroque Horse™



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*Fran J. Scott*





# FRIESIANS AND FREEDOM

## Challenging the Limits of Disability

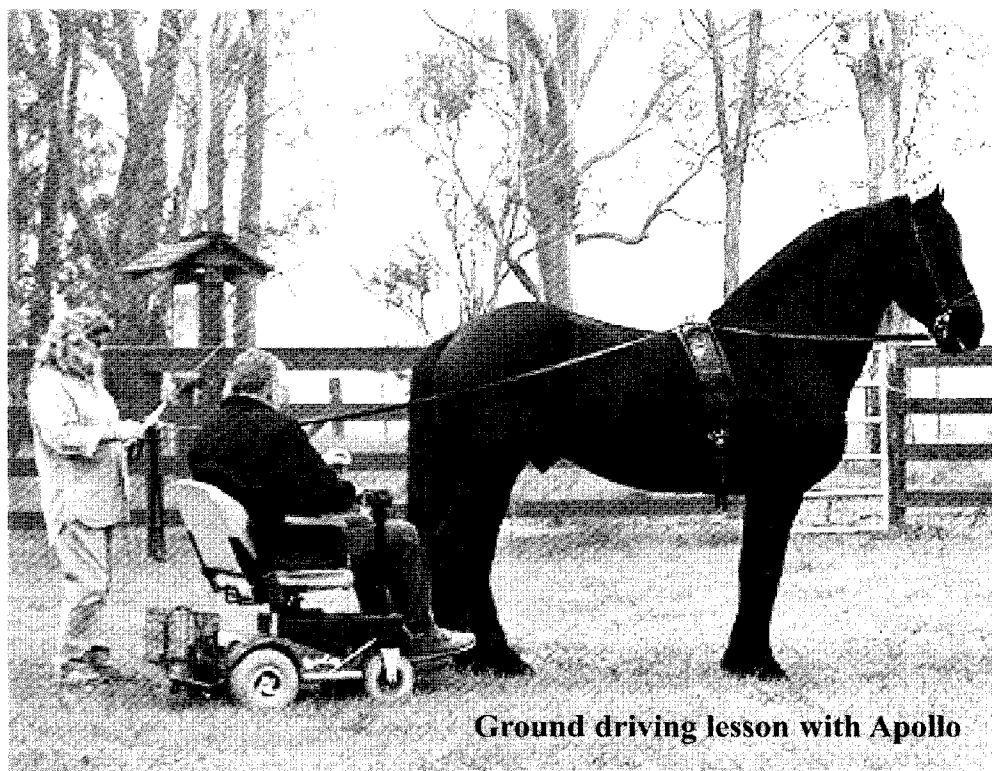
Imagine the boundaries of your life defined by a wheelchair. For twenty-nine year old horsewoman Abigail Stockinger of Fairfield, California, life changed forever nine years ago when a catastrophic accident left her paraplegic and unable to walk. Horses had always been an important part of her life, and she struggled to find a way to stay connected and involved with them. In 2004, she attended a lecture about a remarkable horsedrawn journey across America undertaken by an international team of equestrians with disabilities in 2001.

The Journey Across America was led by the great-grandson of famed environmentalist, John Muir. Fairfield, California horseman, Michael Muir, 56, has lived with multiple sclerosis since he was 15 years old. He was joined on this extraordinary journey of more than 3,000 miles by a paraplegic man from Germany, a blind boy from Mexico, two men with polio from Sweden, and a young woman from England who was brain damaged and paralyzed from an accident. They hitched their horses to wheelchair accessible carriages at the Mission San Diego in CA in January

and drove them across eleven states to reach Washington, DC in November. In 2003, he and a paraplegic woman reenacted John Muir's trek from Indiana to the Gulf of Mexico. These HorseJourneys would change their lives forever.

Michael Muir has focused his life on breeding horses since the age of twelve, despite the debilitating effects of multiple sclerosis. He has been bed-ridden, or wheelchair bound many times over the course of his life, but credits his active life with horses for keeping him engaged in an exciting, productive outdoor lifestyle. He developed the unique, colorful Stonewall Sporthorses from his original line of Appaloosa race and show horses, champion Percherons and the introduction of selected European warmbloods successful at the highest level of international competition.

Unable to ride by the age of 40, Michael turned to carriage driving and was introduced to the sport of combined driving through United States Driving for Disabled, Inc. Michael served two terms as President of that organization and was named four times to represent the U.S. in international and world championship competitions. In 2002, he trained with the renowned Belgian horseman and harness



**Ground driving lesson with Apollo**

maker Hank van der Wiel, driving Friesian horses to win the Challenge de la Somme international pair driving championship, in Amiens, France. They performed at the World Driving Championships in Conty, France and then across Belgium, the Netherlands and into Germany for the World Championship for Drivers with Disabilities in Greven.

In 2005, Michael founded Access Adventure to provide outdoor recreation and environmental education to enrich the lives of people with disabilities and under-served youth. With a five hundred dollar donation and a twenty year old wheelchair cart, Access Adventure launched its first event overlooking San Francisco Bay. The Muir Heritage Land Trust was celebrating the acquisition of the historic Dutra Ranch. Abigail was there to take her first drive, and got a chance to take the reins from Access Adventure volunteer, Susan Hassett and drove the Morgan horse, Triton Osage. Abigail was hooked! She had found a way to challenge the limits of her disability and return to her close connection to the world of horses.



**Michael driving Friesians in Europe**

Access Adventure is a program of the Solano Land Trust with headquarters



**Michael Muir driving Apollo**

at the 2070 acre Rush Ranch near Suisun City, CA. Operating seven days a week, the volunteers of Access Adventure provide open space access using uniquely designed solar powered wheelchair accessible horsedrawn carriages. They offer regular carriage driving events on Solano Land Trust and Muir Heritage Land Trust properties giving people the opportunity to tour the spectacular open spaces they otherwise would not be able to see. The program is open to anyone living with mobility challenges and is not limited to wheelchair users. A program called Anywhere Wild! provides multi-day accessible camping trips to remote, scenic locations throughout California. Access Adventure has a number of active youth programs, working with 4-H, FFA and disabled, disadvantaged and at-risk youth.

"Friesian horses are ideally suited for the work that we do. They are the only dramatic, high moving horses that have a cold-blooded temperament. The kind

nature of the Friesian horse and their natural closeness to their human partners makes them perfect for the work of Access Adventure," said Director Michael Muir. "There are many horses quiet enough for this work, but we really like to drive. The Friesian is strong enough for the work, easy to train and willing to go forward and look good doing



**Assisting a passenger onto the trolley**

it".

Pietje van Exel, the widow of renowned California horseman, Adam van Exel, has donated the Friesian geldings Mercury and Jochem, imported by DeBoer Friesians. This generous donation to Access Adventure provides an exceptional, quality team to serve the program.

Currently, the Access Adventure team is training to compete in ridden dressage and the sport of combined driving. Abigail will soon make her debut driving Friesians. Stroke survivor and amputee, Pam Seifert enjoys dressage. They are supported in their efforts by the special needs students of Golden Hills School who work every week at Rush Ranch learning all aspects of horsemanship. The students enjoy driving and eagerly look forward to playing an active role in the upcoming competitions and Access Adventure events. Despite their own special needs, the students are generous in their efforts to help others and willingly assist the mobility challenged aboard the specially designed carriages. Performing these tasks builds self-esteem, a sense of responsibility, team work, communication and essential job skills. The Golden Hills program is an example of Equine Facilitated Learning, an educational approach that includes equine facilitated activities incorporating the experience of equine/human interaction in an environment of learning or self discovery. Equine Facilitated Therapies are also offered, including therapeutic riding and driving

for disabled youth and veterans.

Access Adventure has forged a new partnership with Royal Knight Friesians to campaign and breed their beautiful stallion Gooitzdn fan't Wyldpaed ("Apollo"). A proven sire of quality offspring, Apollo stands at stud to the public with proceeds benefitting Access Adventure. He is also siring Stonewall Sporthorses with proceeds from the sale of foals to help fund the program. Fandango, his first colt born in April to Michael's young mare Stonewall Fantasia, is a testament to the quality of the breeding being achieved by joining the Stonewall and Friesian bloodlines. Plans are underway to bring Apollo to the FHANA convention in Reno.

Access Adventure is staffed entirely by volunteers and depends on donations to fund this important work. You will find that enriching the lives of others enriches your own. Give wings to the dreams of people living with the challenges of disability. Enrich the lives of children with Nature's gifts.

Learn more about this dynamic organization at [www.access-adventure.org](http://www.access-adventure.org).

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### You can help Access Adventure

Access Adventure is seeking a lease on Friesian mares suitable for breeding to Apollo. The program is always searching for appropriate driving/therapy horses to support the work enriching the lives of people with disabilities. If you have a well-trained, gentle, sound Friesian horse appropriate for this work, please consider a tax-deductible donation or long-term lease. Your horse will receive the best of care, while you will take pleasure in knowing your horse is performing useful, meaningful work.