



OF INTEREST

# *The* **BAREFOOT HORSES OF THE CARAVAN**

*A Transcontinental  
Horse-Drawn Journey*

by Connie Challice



Photo Credit: Vince Hangman

Four weeks into the journey.



## NOVEMBER 1, 2014

The start of The Caravan, a transcontinental horse-drawn journey that departed from Murrieta, California with its goal to arrive in Weirsdale, Florida on March 14, 2015.

Michael Muir, of Access Adventure and Stonewall Sporthorses, was one of the key organizers. His goal was to promote therapeutic driving throughout the southern United States by organizing events at various therapeutic riding facilities on The Caravan's route. Michael has led a very successful and amazing life since being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) at age fifteen. Michael's journey with horses has earned national grand championships in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. He has represented the United States, winning world championship and carriage driving medals in Germany, Austria, France and Great Britain. Teaming up with Verne Kemble of Calgary, Alberta, Canada and Verne's two Belgian/quarter horse crosses, Tom and Jake, Michael and Verne set out on this horse-drawn journey.

Hoof care was a very important concern. As the old saying goes, "no hoof, no horse." Verne has seen the benefits of keeping his horses barefoot and living a natural lifestyle (Natural Performance trim, lots of movement, and a natural diet consisting of grass hay and free-choice minerals). However, to do a five-month journey across unknown terrain, and bringing his horses from Canada, would they need time to adjust to the climate? Verne was committed to the program and set off to the U.S. with trimming tools and hoof boots (sponsored and provided by Cavallo). Would this be a great test of what barefoot horses with healthy hooves can do?

Verne joined The Caravan in Yuma, Arizona (after travelling with some friends to Surprise, Arizona and spending some time riding and driving in the desert). His second day on The

Caravan, Verne, Tom and Jake pulled Access Adventures' wheelchair-accessible wagon in the Veterans Day parade promoting therapeutic driving. The journey continued as The Caravan started their day by rising at 4:30 AM and driving by 6:30AM to beat the heat. They would drive horses and wagons to their destination and go back for vehicles and trailers. They encountered all types of terrain—desert, gravel, pavement, dirt. Most of the other Caravan participants were using metal horse shoes with borium welded onto the metal to preserve it from being worn quickly. The terrain was so abrasive the borium-welded metal horse shoes were being replaced every week and a half to two weeks. Some of the metal shoes were completely worn after a single day on the pavement. Tom and Jake's healthy hooves rose to the demand of the miles asked of them on the trek and they were in need of a trim after six weeks of abrasive terrain!

At this time, the other Caravaners were noticing the success Verne's horses were having travelling barefoot. Tom and Jake were booted 10% of the time—using Cavallo hoof boots—and barefoot 90% of the journey. Verne knew of the success the Houston Police Department's Mounted Unit has had transitioning the police horses from a conventional lifestyle of metal shoes, stalls, and processed feed to barefoot, bitless, a natural lifestyle with more movement, and a natural diet. Verne suggested when they got near Houston he would arrange a tour of the Mounted Patrol's facility.

## DECEMBER 22, 2014

The trek continued until they reached Hondo, Texas. Most of the "Caravaners" returned home for Christmas while some participants stayed with the horses at a ranch where Caravaner Deb White resided with her family. Tom and Jake were ridden during this time and had a chance to relax as well.



Photo Credit: Margot McMaster

*Above:* Jake's hoof at the first vet check after hundreds of miles on all terrain. It is commonly believed that the hoof will wear down, but as you can see Jake's healthy hoof has risen to the demand and he actually needs a trim!

*Below:* Derrick, a young potential Paralympian, had his hand at driving a pair of horses in January at SIRE Therapeutic Horsemanship in Hockley, Texas.



Photo Credit: Connie Challice

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## JANUARY 4, 2015

The Caravan regained momentum and journeyed to College Station, Texas where they stayed at a 900-acre ranch. The increased population was preventing the group from moving each day by horse and wagon, forcing The Caravan to stop at various sites and stay five or six days. This was great for local people following The Caravan, as it enabled them to join up with the trek for a day or two (or three) and drive their horses with The Caravan group. The Caravan took on a whole new outlook, meeting and networking with so many amazing people. News reporters showed up and did segments on the trip.

Michael also had one of his Stonewall Sport-horses join in on the journey after Christmas break. Mystique, a Knabstrupper/ Percheron cross that Michael bred, was just beginning her

driving training. This made four barefoot horses on The Caravan journey as there was another participant—Jane Anderson with her amazing Morgan horse, Stonewall. Jane successfully completed the entire trek barefoot using hoof boots a very small percentage of the time. Jane and Stonewall also accrued many extra miles hitching and having fun in the off time by offering rides, for example, to showers at some of the camp grounds or just hitting the trails again after driving during the day.

## JANUARY 17, 2015

The Caravan was invited to ride with the Parson's Mounted Cavalry of Texas A&M University. The Cavalry has run barefoot very successfully for nine years. Manager Bob Byrns discussed with some of The Caravan group the absolute total success

of their 'barefoot' program. The Cavalry participates in a number of public demonstrations, parades and stadium events. They have built what they call the "infinity run" to assist in keeping their horses in a more natural lifestyle. The infinity run consists of 30-foot-wide pathways around various pastures. The pathways have hay in randomly-placed feeders so the horses are always travelling for hay and they need to travel back to the barn area for minerals and water. This infinity run mimics a natural lifestyle and keeps the horses moving like they would in the wild. They get turned out into the pastures in the middle of the pathways for a couple hours of grazing each day.

## JANUARY 20, 2015

One of the highlights of this trip was the visit to the Houston Police Department Mounted Patrol. Senior Police Officer Gregory Sokoloski, along with Sergeant Leslie Wills, welcomed the Caravan group, shared their story and gave a wonderful tour of their amazing facility. The mounted patrol started in 1983 with fourteen horses and expanded to forty-three horses by 2004. They currently keep forty horses. During the time of conventional care they were experiencing many health issues, colics and lameness problems. Records were showing that at fifteen years old, the peak of maturity, the horses were being retired due to their bodies breaking down and lameness issues. There were also many cases of colic.

Greg began to question the care the horses were receiving and to research alternatives. He questioned the metal shoes and was told horses need them for traction and protection. "Their hooves will wear down," he was told. Metal shoes on pavement were slippery, even with borium welded onto the shoe. In December 2003, Greg and his supervisor attended a barefoot trimming seminar.

Greg said, I was stunned and fascinated by the importance of the hoof mechanism and the

Jane Anderson and her amazing horse, Stonewall, completed the journey barefoot using hoof boots a small amount of the time.



Photo: Connie Challice



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idea that so many of the injuries and behavioral problems could be attributed to the metal shoe. Greg was given permission to remove shoes from his mount, Shadow, a four-year-old warm-blood. Greg reported that, after working five fourteen-hour days in a row, his horse moved so much better. He was much more confident in all gaits over the different road surfaces. His traction was excellent and there was no wear of his hooves after riding.

They pulled metal shoes on four more horses and saw the benefits. Lameness, navicular "disease" and body issues disappeared. Colic cases began to disappear with changes in diet and lifestyle. Greg was met with lots of resistance, however veterinary bills and farrier bills decreased significantly and the changes in their horse care did move forward. The decrease in costs was so significant it enabled the department to build a whole new natural facility to house the police horses.

Upon arrival at the Mounted Patrol's facility, The Caravaners spent time in a classroom hearing about the police horses, then went outside and—wow! The facility is amazing! All the horses are engaged, happy, healthy and enjoy their work. The officers practice natural horsemanship and have a relationship with their equine partners.

The Caravan continued south to the Gulf of Mexico where they spent ten days on the beach, riding and driving in and along the ocean. Then up towards New Orleans and Mardi Gras! The Caravan participated in parades and enjoyed taking in the celebrations.

## FEBRUARY 19, 2015

The Caravan arrived in Florida and spent time at various horse parks enjoying some amazing driving in well-run facilities, working towards their goal. Tom and Jake successfully completed their barefoot journey across the southern United States and lead the grand finale of The Caravan into Grande Oaks Resort on March 14th, 2015.

Tom and Jake's hooves have continued to rise to the demand put upon them. They have travelled hundreds of miles en route and logged many extra at therapeutic facility events. When the other horses of the Caravan are in need of a 'rest' Verne usually saddles up or hitches up and enjoys the day with his amazing team. Also, the hoof boots are all showing very little signs of wear and everyone has the original hoof boots they started with at the beginning of the adventure.

Verne's courage to step out and 'test' all the barefoot theories has been an inspiration to many people from all over the world who have been watching his journey across the United

States. The barefoot horses of The Caravan have far exceeded expectations. Their healthy hooves have truly shone and out-performed conventionally-shod horses with metal shoes. ♡



*About the author:*  
Connie Challice and Birgitta Wilkinson are the owners and director of Success With Horses,

Natural Performance Hoof Care. To complement their passion for natural hoof care, Connie operates a carriage ride business and drives horses in parades, community events, weddings and special occasions. Connie also takes her horses, with their healthy hooves, into the Rocky Mountains as much as possible, always testing how the healthy hoof can perform on all terrain. Connie is devoted to continuing research on equine podiatry and to educating horse owners, veterinarians, farriers and all who are interested in the positive effects that natural hoof care/ horse care has on the equine, how the horses hoof functions and how to build a healthy hoof.

For more information on Natural Performance Hoof Care and building healthy hooves, visit our website at: [www.successwithhorses.com](http://www.successwithhorses.com)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- Facebook:  
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- [www.Thecaravanfilm.ca](http://www.Thecaravanfilm.ca)  
Facebook, The Caravan Film:  
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- Houston Mounted Police Department:  
<http://www.houstontx.gov/police/mounted/patrol.htm>
- Parsons Mounted Cavalry:  
<http://pmc.aggiecorps.org/>



Photo: Verne Kemble

Greg Sokoloski, Senior Officer of the Houston Police Department's Mounted Patrol, shows us the healthy hooves of the police horses on our January 20th tour of the facility.