

# TREATISE ON FARRIER OCCUPATION. PART I

BY MAKSIDA VOGT

## *Shoeing – a case for animal protection?*

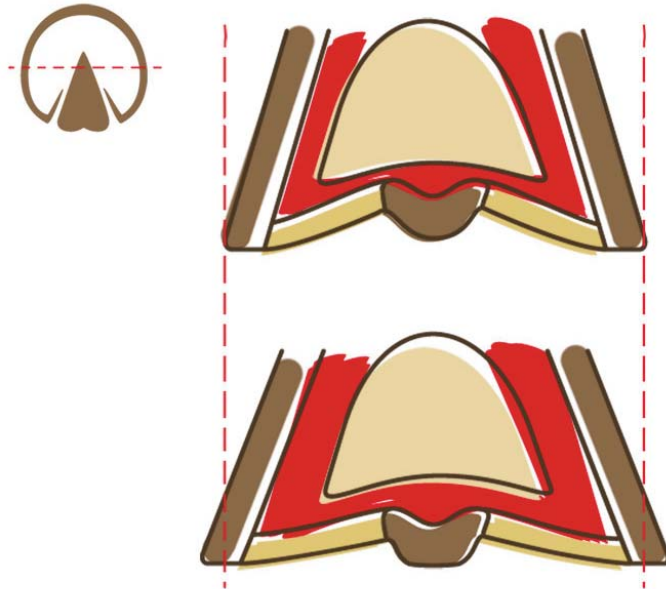
In the horseworld there are so many popular and vital errors existing, it is very difficult for the horse owner, who searches for the truth to find it. This begins with the intention to get the correct picture about the hooves of your horse to be able to judge their condition. What is the first thing an average rider does for the hoofcare of his horse?

He calls a farrier.

But does the farrier have the necessary knowledge to understand and treat the hoof at all? This is doubtful.

My own experiences with the farriers and in the discussions with them made me write this down, to help other horse owners to a better understanding of this matter. I believe, for a horse owner, who cares about welfare of his horse, it is of crucial importance first to understand why shoeing is so harmful for the horse.

When you shoe your horse, you will first of all incapacitate this ORGAN in its function. The hoof of a horse expands when it touches the ground under the weight of the horse and contracts when the hoof is non weight bearing. This has one name – hoof mechanism, and it helps the horse to pump the blood back to its heart and to have good shock absorption, so the joints are not harmed. What happens when you allow your horse to be shod?



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Then the hoof will be able to widen only minimally in the heels (which is to be seen by the wear of the iron shoes) and I suppose everyone can imagine the pain caused by the iron shoes when hoof tries to widen under the horse's weight. The feeling you have caused by the shoeing is to be compared with the feeling you would experience if you would be forced to walk in a size smaller shoe! This situation causes disruptions in blood circulation inside the hoof capsule. Firstly blood circulation in the toe area is affected. Due the lack of blood supply in the toe, the nerves also stop functioning there and the toe becomes numb. Due to the specifics of the circulatory system in the horse's hoof, the heels could continue receiving a more or less full blood supply for a longer time, that causes a horse to feel pain from damage there for much longer. Eventually, the lack of the blood supply causes tissues inside the hoof capsule to die.

When you allow your horse to be shod you harm his heart, which is dependent on the functioning hoof mechanism in order to function properly, as the hooves do 60% of the pumping job in the horse body.

There is a long list of physical HARM which you cause to your horse, if you allow it to be shod. The coffin bone will cause bruising trauma on the solar corium, due to inability of the solar vault to spread on weight-bearing. In time other things will appear for example: ossification of lateral cartilages; cell metabolism and the circulation are sorely afflicted, which again causes bad horn quality; waste products are not used for producing hoof horns and stay in the body, which stresses and damages the metabolic organs such as liver, kidneys, skin, etc.; impact shock is increased, which causes damage to the joints.

This was "only" a short extract of the harm which you cause to your horse if you allow it to be shod – harm, which happens in his body and about which you will never be told by the farrier.

Why?

Why does the farrier not tell you this?

It is his obligation to ensure the HEALTH of your horse hooves.

Do you trust this man?

One of the reasons of this sad and terrifying truth is that the majority of farriers do not know this. They have never been taught this. Another reason, and this is also sad, is that farriers make more money shoeing. This is repeatedly confirmed by farriers in many discussions I have had with them.

“If I do not do it, then someone else will do it.”

In numerous discussions with the farriers there was NOT ONE who could give the reasons which would show why shoeing would be good FOR THE HORSE. Quite the contrary many have admitted they would not shoe the horse if the owner did not explicitly ask for it as they want to use the horse for some purpose, like riding for example. So with this we come to the third sad truth, that all those farriers, and every farrier who is ready to shoe your horse, will do this only for only one reason:

Because he/she has not enough knowledge to trim the hooves of your horse correctly AND to inform you about the appropriate species keeping, so that your horse can grow healthy hooves and go over all terrain without any difficulty.

***The scientific facts, the ethical facts, the anatomical facts that speak against shoeing are indisputable. Thus we can say that shoeing represents bodily injury and that it is criminal assault.***

*In the decision of the Federal Constitutional Court Germany from 3. July 2007 it says:*

*“2. Judging after reference of the licensed veterinarian L... shoeing the horse is always to be seen as ‘necessary evil’. The functional necessary hoof mechanism, also the elastic strain of the hoof capsule by load and easing of the limbs, is through the iron shoes extremely limited or even completely stopped and the blood circulation of the limb is therefore disabled. Furthermore, because of the shoes, nails and harmful influence of horn growth tensions are created in the hoof, which damages the horn capsule and will also lead to pain and lameness. The best possible way to keep the horse sound is to let the horse remain unshod. Farriers and barefoot trimmers are not enemies, but specialists in each subject. The horse owner should have a choice between different alternative hoof trimming methods. From the owner’s own veterinary experiences, he/she sees no harm through the work of hoof orthopedists and hoof carers but his/her own experiences have shown that badly placed iron shoes can cause harm to the health of the horse.*

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*3. For the first Association of the German Farriers Prof. Dr. A... points to the fact that there is correspondence between professionals of the veterinary medicine, that horses if possible should be left barefoot.”*

Those veterinarians are only few but there is a long list of responsible veterinary professionals, who understand their subject and do not misuse their oath, but who stand up for the health of the animal and speak out against shoeing. Among the scientists who know about the harm of shoeing the following should be mentioned: Dr. Bracy Clark, Dr. Luca Bein, Prof. Lungowitz, Prof. Smedegard, Dr Rudolf Zierold, Prof. Chris Pollitt, Dr. Hinterhofer, Prof. Robert Cook, Dr. med vet Hiltrud Strasser, Prof. R. Adams. With Xenophon leading the way, who so many riders acknowledge as father of the riding skill, has prescribed, horses should move as much as possible on gravel so that their hooves get “dressed to size” and hardened. Even at that time it was recognized, that hooves need movement and hardening so that the horse stays rideable.

Please let me underline this again:

***“Hooves need movement and hardening so that the horse is rideable. It is not other way around, that a horse with ill or sensitive hooves must be shod to be rideable!”***

Be aware that if your horse is shod, then it will probably have badly functioning hooves, which need correctional treatment first.

And then let us repeat this sentence again:

***“...that if possible horses are to be left barefooted.”***

Is it possible?

Why would it not be possible?

You have heard made farriers telling you that it is not possible because they are missing the knowledge that correct trimming of the hoof would make this possible. It is difficult for them to explain to some riders, that horses need species appropriate keeping; open stables, movement over different types of ground to be rideable without shoes because around the corner is already the next unscrupulous colleague waiting to shoe the horse without any questions. Fear of losing the client is big.

“If I do not do it then someone else will do it.”

To illustrate what consequences this can have for your horse in the worst case, I will show you the work of one farrier. Do not make the mistake of thinking this must be the work of a dilettante. Far from it. This farrier is in great demand and has the reputation to be able to “set a horse on its feet.” The sad thing about it is that he really is the best one in the greater vicinity. The others are even less qualified for the job.

The horse with shoes:



It has to be mentioned, that aforesaid farrier had shod this horse for years (the horse had not been ridden or used in any other way) and the hoof wall could not grow in all those years. It was also missing part of the frog, but this is not surprising with such treatment. Rather it is the consequence of incompetent hoof treatment and a lack of knowledge.

After this horse was entrusted into my care and the shoes were removed, the whole extent of the disaster to her hooves was revealed.



It should not go unmentioned, that farrier tried it hard to sabotage my intention to free this horse from shoes by telling to the horse owner and everyone who wanted to hear, that this horse would never be able to walk without shoes, that he would be lame and would surely... die. The reader can imagine how much persuasiveness was needed in order to ease those scared people and only through absorption of some costs was it possible at all to convince the owner to trust us. With this I want to state explicitly, the methods used by almost every farrier when finding himself in such or similar situation, when the actual aim should be to help the horse!

After removal of the shoes and some correct trimming, the hooves were in this condition:



Here again for direct comparison:



This is the same hoof!

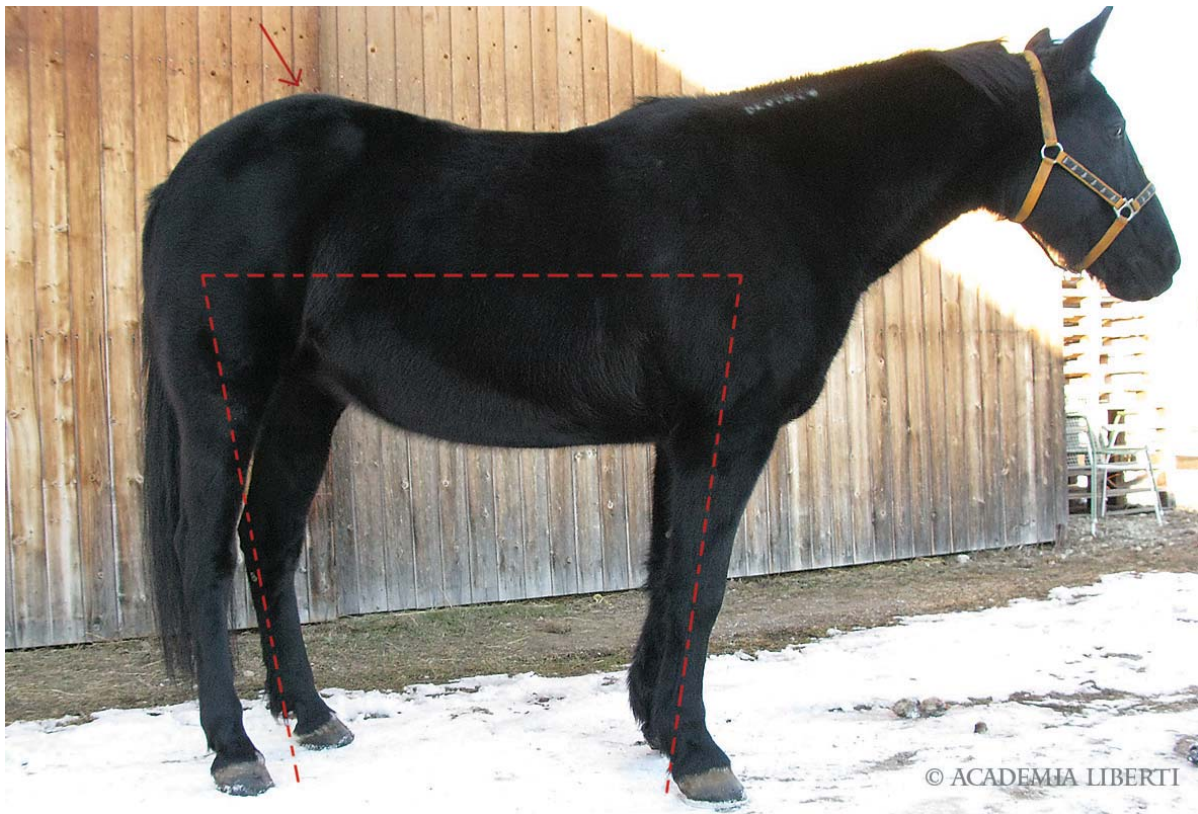
The left photo is of a hoof treated by the same farrier, who stated that this hoof wall can not grow so fast because the hooves were in such bad condition.

The right photo is the same hoof after a few months of correct hoof care, trimmed in the Strasser manner.

How can you as a horse owner be able to recognize if your horse has hoof problems?

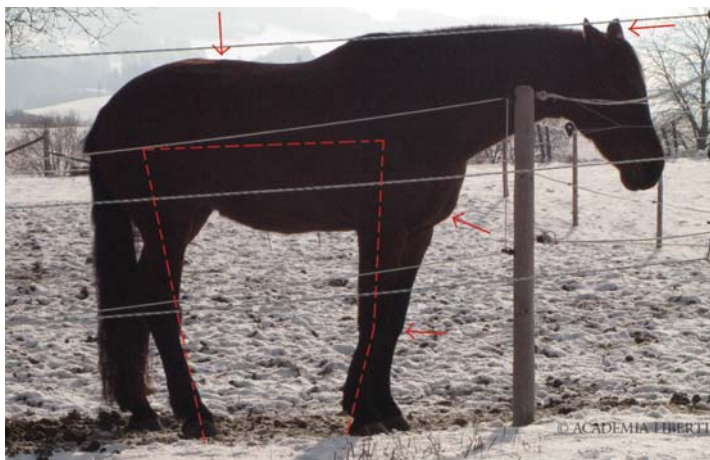
At first you watch the body posture of your horse, allowing him to stand free and relaxed. The following photos show shod horses and you will notice that the majority of such horses show same pain signs:





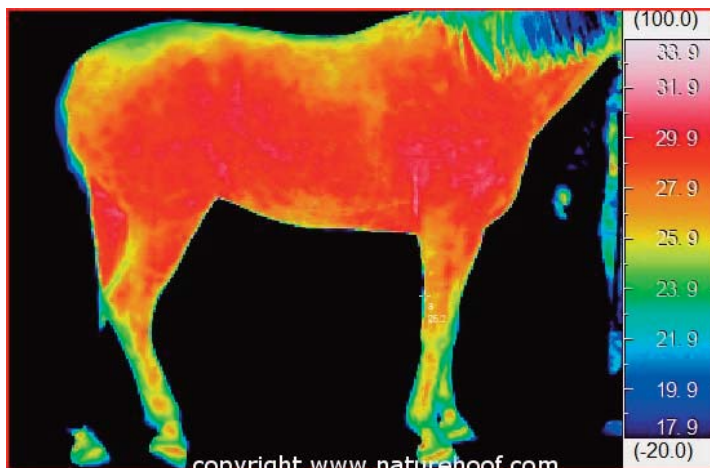
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As we can see these horses put their legs obviously under their body. Why do they do that? That is not the normal posture for the horse's body, it is even a very strenuous and unhealthy posture.



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Farriers trim the hooves in general differently when they shoe the horse for the horse to go barefoot. The heels are let too high, which makes the blood supply inside the hoof capsule partially or fully cut off. At such time the shoe is nailed and the horse has to stand and walk on it. Anybody can imagine this unpleasant feeling when the hoof should widen and it can only do so minimally in the heel area fixed by the shoes. The blood can only minimally reach the toes or not at all. Because of this circulation is alarmingly reduced or even cut. With time the toe gets numb and the horse does not feel pain there anymore.



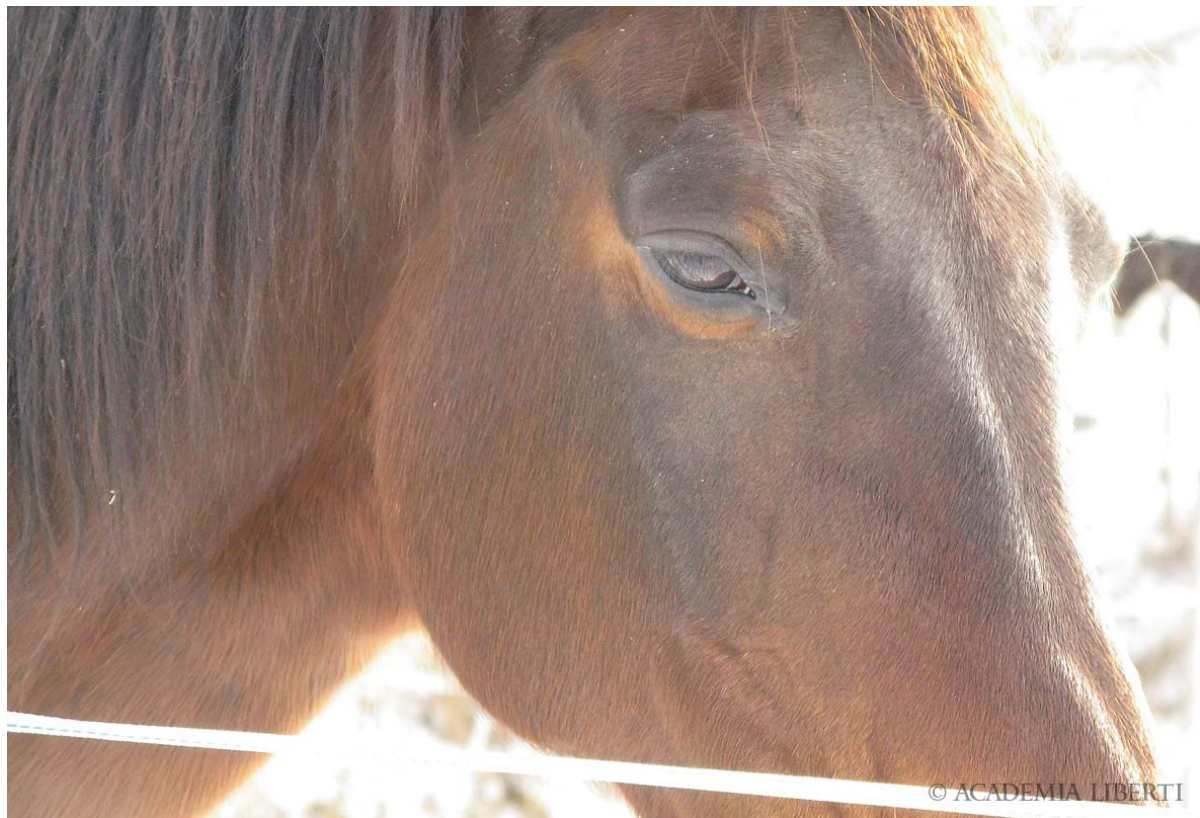
However the heels, which are still high and cause painful pressure on the corium, remain sensitive to pain for much longer due to the specific of circulatory system of the hoof. A horse still feels pain from the non-physiological pressure and damage to the living tissues in the back of his hooves. To avoid this pain, the horse puts his legs further under his body, in this way shifting the weight more to the numb toes. The harm which this causes in the hoof is enormous. The horse is in pain.

You can clearly see this on the photos on the left which shows another such horse and the thermo shots belong to this horse.

Among the other diseases one can see in those images, it is clear to see how blood circulation is reduced in the hooves and legs. These are symptoms to be looked for in all shod horses.

Some horses are shod in such way, that the whole hoof becomes numb.

Some horses acquire bucked knees as muscles become too exhausted to keep this unnatural painful posture and they shift the carpal joint forward. Pay attention to the marks on the photos and learn to recognize pain signs which horse shows. The posture, the tensed body, leg position, shoulder, ears and this all together. Also face of the horse is telling very much, like the face belonging to this horse:

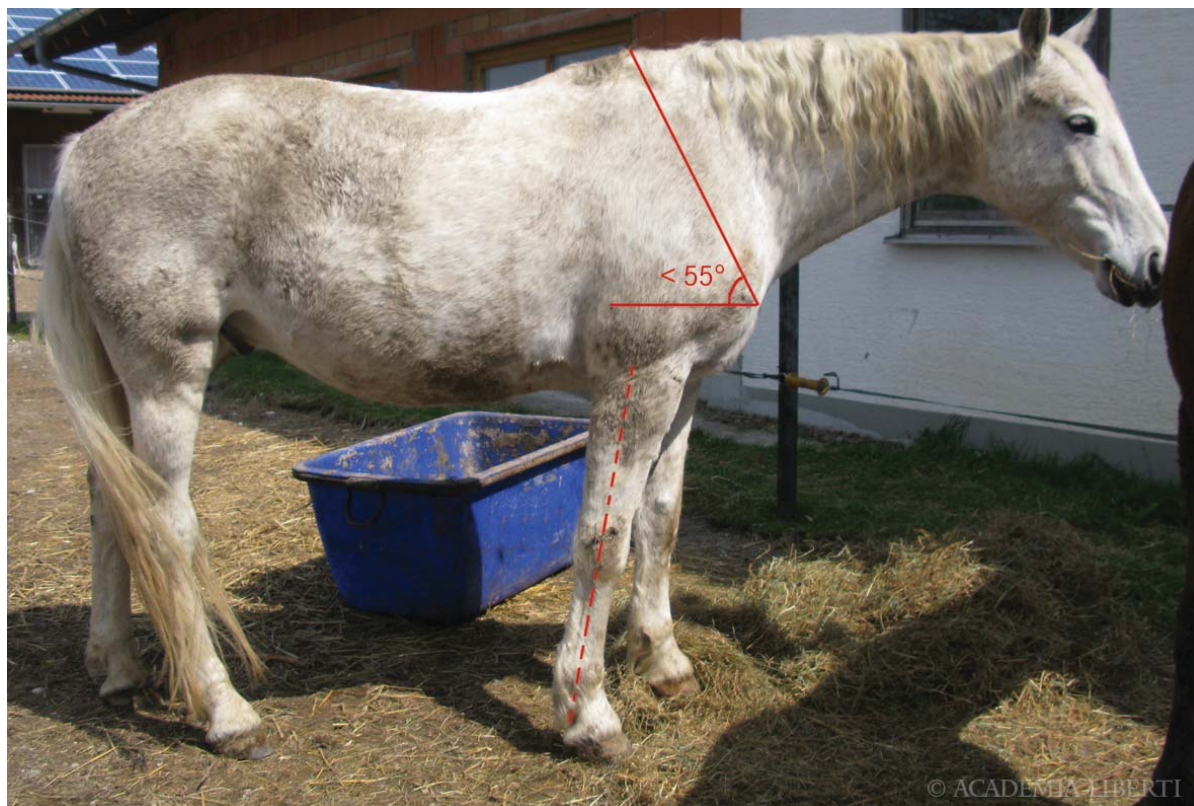


Notice the ears position – “dull ears” – the horse is listening “inside itself”, deep holes above eyes, asymmetrical nostrils indicating stronger pain on one side, the pronouncing blood vessels in the resting horse. This face and eyes show pain very clear.

The other point on which you can focus is the shoulder of the horse. Through examination it can be documented that the angle of the shoulder of healthy horses is less steep than of the horses who are shod with high heels and have hoof deformation. Those horses showed less of a steep shoulder angle after correct treatment and becoming pain free.

The angle of the shoulder of a healthy horse should be between  $45^{\circ}$  and  $55^{\circ}$ . The bones of the limbs have certain angles supported by tendons, which influence the angle of the shoulder. In all anatomy books the coffin bone is shown parallel to the ground which is the correct position. That means if the horse stands in the correct position he then uses only his tendons to keep himself upright and does not need any muscle work for it, and the shoulder shows the correct angle.

In shod horses with painful heels, as well as horses with incorrect trimmed hooves, the shoulder angle is much steeper. The muscles have to carry out unnatural work and are mostly strained. This is often to be seen on bulged and bumped muscles which such horses show even when allowed to stand as free as they want. The muscles are also correspondingly hard. Why should one animal go into the unnatural posture, which costs energy, if not from pain?!



Maybe your farrier can answer those questions for you and say why such problems disappear with the correct hoof care?

If so please be kind enough to send his answers to me.

Also ask your farrier if we can publish his answers and his name. :)

This is the posture of correctly trimmed horse:





In this first part I would like to finalize by telling parts of the conversation with a farrier. He had just shod a horse and tried in the presence of the horse owner to justify shoeing. He said that horses walk much better when shod and that the horse could not go without shoes.

“Yes, shoeing is so good for the horse, so good that all horses are born with shoes. Nature is so wise, it gives horses shoes on their hooves, because they can not walk without them.” – I answered.

He had to admit that horses walk best barefoot and after the horse owner had walked away, he even told to me, that many times

he advised a horse owner not to shoe their horse, as it would be better for him, but the owner wanted to ride and did not want to hear any reasons why the horse should not be shod.

And there are great examples of people, who worked as farriers, and recognized harm of shoeing. People who have chosen way for the horse, barefoot, like Ramey, Jackson to mention only few of them.

I would like to recommend an article of an ex-farrier John Graves “My conversion. A farrier's journey to natural hoof care”, [www.LiberatedHorsemanship.com](http://www.LiberatedHorsemanship.com).

He describes his experiences being farrier and finding right way to the natural hoof care, which made it possible for him to really help horses:

“The pain and suffering I’ve seen domestic equines endure through ‘well intentioned’ conventional hoof care needs to be ended.

I know why horseshoers do what they do, and why most veterinarians prescribe what they prescribe. I was taught the exact same methods and belief system. For some it's ignorance of hoof mechanism function and physiology. For others it's job security and financial need. For others still, it's an addiction to the iron – they must feel the job satisfaction received from performing well at an art that is very old and very difficult to master. Almost all farriers will tell you, ‘It's all about horses’ at some point in any discussion about what it is they do. Some are sincere in that belief. Some are giving lip service. They all believe their antiquated occupation is a very noble, honest, ‘salt of the earth’ endeavor. And that would be true if it weren't based on a foundation of misinformation stretching back a thousand years.

I often tell horse owners, when asked about why I believe horse shoeing is wrong, that when horse shoeing was invented, they thought the world was flat and the center of the universe.”

If you have a specialist, who has a knowledge of trimming hooves correctly, then your horse will walk and run over any ground as the healthy hoof is able to do so. The hoof is nature's masterpiece, it adapts to any ground when a horse is given the possibility to move over such ground regularly.

Any farrier who is ready to shoe horses... does not have sufficient knowledge. If you trust your horse's health to such a person, it is up to you.