

A Timeline of the Barefoot Movement

by Yvonne Welz

Every now and then, I am reminded about how much misinformation exists surrounding the development of the “barefoot movement.” Often it is just an error of omission, or not giving credit where credit is due; other times it is exaggeration or myth. The truth is, if anyone is in the situation to provide an accurate overview of what really happened, I am—because *The Horse’s Hoof* was there, right from the beginning, documenting the developments. I know when many people attended their first clinics, ordered their first barefoot books or called to ask about barefoot hooves. I watched every barefoot event unfold live, as it happened. The barefoot movement “belongs” to not one single group or person—but we should all give credit where credit is due. **Thank you** to all who were a part of this!

This timeline is certainly NOT a complete list of all events that have taken place, nor does it include every person who had an impact. This is simply a summary of **some important barefoot** events that are substantiated by our files, written as **neutrally** as possible. Also, most of the events listed here took place in North America, and other countries certainly have their own complex histories surrounding barefoot.

The Founders

The number one thing to keep in mind is that everyone involved in the modern barefoot hoof-care movement was influenced by either a) **Jaime Jackson**, or b) **Dr. Hiltrud Strasser**, or both. No modern barefoot system was created without the direct or indirect influence of these two individuals. Everyone that you read about who is influential in the barefoot world was either a) a student of one of these two pioneers, or b) directly influenced by them in *some* way (maybe they just read their books or attended a clinic). There was no “barefoot movement” before these two great horse people. That’s why it is important for everyone involved in barefoot to study all of their material; they are the true original thinkers.

Now this doesn’t mean there wasn’t someone, somewhere else during the past 30 or more years having some thoughts about barefooting horses, maybe even doing it successfully. However, any farriers who specialized in barefoot still kept shoeing. Barefoot was only for “certain horses.” Certainly no one else suggested that **every** horse should go barefoot for health reasons! And if they were talking about that at all, no one was listening, and they ended up having little to no influence on others. The truth is that not many horseowners even listened to either Strasser or Jackson at first, until the two of them appeared to join forces for a very brief time.

So who actually came first? In Germany, veteri-



Sabine Kells with Jaime Jackson and Dr. Hiltrud Strasser at Strasser’s “Hufklinik” in Tuebingen, Germany in November 1999.

narian Dr. Hiltrud Strasser began publishing barefoot books in 1988 (I have a copy of one), after developing her barefoot trim, and teaching seminars by 1979. In the USA, farrier Jaime Jackson began exploring barefoot concepts around that same time, studying wild horses in 1982, and finally publishing his first book *The Natural Horse* in 1992. Both individuals were unconnected at this time and had no knowledge of each other. **This was a simultaneous and similar discovery.**

In 1996, Jackson and Strasser began to correspond long-distance through a translator (Dr. Strasser did not yet speak any English), and exchanged many letters over the next couple of years, sharing their research. Jackson provided Strasser with a mustang cadaver hoof specimen. With the help of her Canadian student, Sabine Kells, Dr. Strasser published her first English-language book *A Lifetime of Soundness* in 1998. Although Jackson had published *The Natural Horse* in 1992, his book did not suggest the barefooting of riding horses. Therefore, Strasser’s book was revolutionary—as a German veterinarian, she clearly outlined that ALL horses would benefit from barefoot, and positioned barefoot horse care as a therapeutic option for the rehabilitation of even severe founder and navicular. In 1998, Jackson’s company, Star Ridge Publishing, became the first U.S. distributor of Dr. Strasser’s books, and also sponsored her first USA clinic tour in 2000.

The Events

It is my opinion that the “movement” of modern barefoot hoofcare for horses really began in 1999, due to a few pivotal events that occurred during that year to raise barefoot into public awareness. First was the widespread reading and internet discussion of Strasser’s newly-published book, *A Lifetime of Soundness*, followed quickly by Jaime Jackson’s 1999 book, *Horse Owners Guide to Natural Hoof Care* (1st edition)—which frequently mentioned Strasser. Second was the release of the first barefoot hoofcare newsletter: Jaime

Photo courtesy Sabine Kells

Jackson’s *The Hoof Care Advisor*. Finally, the third major event was the initial meeting that took place between Dr. Hiltrud Strasser and Jaime Jackson—in November 1999, at Strasser’s Hoof Clinic in Tuebingen, Germany. (Ironically, this meeting led most of us barefoot advocates to believe that Strasser and Jackson were working together in total unity at the time.)

Timeline of Events:

June 1998: Publication of Dr. Strasser and Sabine Kells’ *A Lifetime of Soundness, The Keys to Optimal Horse Health, Lameness Rehabilitation and the High-Performance Barefoot Horse*, sold through Jaime Jackson’s company, Star Ridge Publishing.

Late 1998: Graduation of Sabine Kells, the first Hoofcare Specialist in North America trained by Dr. Strasser.

May 1999: The first edition of Jaime Jackson’s barefoot newsletter *The Hoof Care Advisor* is published. Only 6 issues were released in total (one year for this bimonthly publication).

June 1999: Dr. Strasser visits North America for the first time, and presents 2 hoof care seminars on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. This clinic is attended by Gretchen Fathauer, owner of very popular website naturalhorsetrim.com and the “naturalhorsetrim” yahoo group.

August 1999: This is when my husband James & I first enter the barefoot movement, after reading Strasser’s *A Lifetime of Soundness*, and then contacting Sabine Kells in Canada for a consultation, quickly followed by training for James in Canada.

Late 1999: Jaime Jackson publishes the first edition of *Horse Owners Guide to Natural Hoof Care*. The book’s content is very complementary to Dr. Strasser’s material and only confirms the outward appearance that the two of them are working together in sync for the barefoot movement.

Late 1999: Publication of Dr. Hiltrud Strasser’s book, *Shoeing: A Necessary Evil? Facts Every Horse Owner Should Know About Shoeing*. With the sudden availability of multiple barefoot books, interest in barefoot began to soar. Due to Jackson’s heavy promotion of Dr. Strasser, the Strasser method became a very hot topic on the internet, as featured on websites such as naturalhorsetrim.com.

November 1999: During a trip to Europe that includes a visit to the Swiss Hoof Boot company in Switzerland, Jaime Jackson meets with Sabine Kells and Dr. Hiltrud Strasser at her hoof rehabilitation clinic in Tuebingen, Germany. Sabine Kells acted as translator, as Strasser had not yet become fluent in English. This meeting took place on one

day only. This meeting, which included Strasser presenting her trimming method to Jackson, eventually led both parties to a disagreement in both technique and theory. (It is now clear that their trimming methods are vastly different.)

May 2000: The first Hiltrud Strasser Hoof Care Seminars in the USA take place in May 2000 in San Jose, California; Austin, Texas; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Columbus, Ohio. The seminar tour was organized and sponsored by Jaime Jackson's company, Star Ridge Publishing. Sabine Kells did much of the presentation for her training to become a seminar instructor. Many well-known names attended these seminars, including James Welz, Martha Olivo, Cindy "Hawk" Sullivan, and Dr. Robert Cook.

June 2000: The yahoo group "naturalhorsetrim" is cofounded by Gretchen Fathauer and Yvonne Welz. This yahoo group went on to become one of the most popular barefoot chat groups on the internet at the time, and was created to be a support group for horse owners interested in high performance barefooted horses, the Strasser method of rehabilitation, and Jaime Jackson's wild horse studies.

July 2000: The last issue of Jaime Jackson's newsletter *The Hoof Care Advisor* (retitled, *The Natural Horsecare Advisor*), Volume 1, Issue 6, is released with the announcement that the Advisor would be discontinued. The termination of this successful publication at that time seemed quite odd to many barefoot enthusiasts, myself included. It was the announced ending of this publication that inspired me to start up *The Horse's Hoof*. Due to my ignorance of the increasing disagreements between Strasser and Jackson, I asked both to be my technical advisors. Jackson politely declined. (In retrospect, I understand that Jackson was trying to separate himself from Strasser, but I had no knowledge of this at that time.)

Summer 2000: Enrollment begins in Dr. Strasser's first Hoofcare Specialist Certification Course to be offered to students outside of Germany. The year-long course, which started in September, included both long-distance learning and hands-on training (in Canada with licensed course instructor Sabine Kells, and Germany with Dr. Strasser), with the final exams held in Germany. James enrolled in this course, which was the very first professional barefoot educational program ever offered in North America.

Summer 2000: Cindy "Hawk" Sullivan, who had just attended a May 2000 Strasser seminar, brings this information back to her friend, Pete Ramey. Unfortunately, when applied to his string of trail riding horses, this trim did not go over so well, and that's when Pete began developing his own method. Cindy went on to publish a pictorial how-to guide for the Strasser trim (as she'd observed) called the "12 Step Trimming" Strasser Guidelines, made available on her website. This was downloaded by many horseowners at that time.

Summer 2000: Our website thehorsehoof.com is launched. It was created to promote barefoot horse care in general, and sell subscriptions to *The Horse's Hoof*. To help pay for production costs, I eventually included the sale of books and products related to barefoot horse care.

September 2000: The very first issue of *The Horse's Hoof, News for Natural Hoofcare* is mailed out to the handful of new subscribers. I printed the copies of this 16 page newsletter myself on an HP Deskjet inkjet printer.



2001 Graduation of the first class of Strasser Hoofcare Specialists from North America. James Welz is holding the German beer.

May 2001: Graduation in Tuebingen, Germany, of the first class of 10 Strasser Hoofcare Specialists from North America, which included James Welz, Martha Olivo, Nancy Filbert, Todd Merrell, and Marjorie Smith (creator of the popular site barefoothorse.com), among others. Martha Olivo, a farrier, had been presenting her own public barefoot clinics just prior to enrolling in this course, so she was allowed to continue to do so, even though everyone signed a contract specifying "no clinics." There were very strict controls on what "CSHS" (Certified Strasser Hoofcare Specialists) were allowed to do (no clinics or presentations could be given without further training, no organized clinic-like trimming instruction for owners, no articles could be written without approval), and yearly recertification with Dr. Strasser was required.

June 2001: Three graduates of the N.A. Strasser class publicly criticize Dr. Strasser, which leads to a removal of their certifications—an unfortunate situation (with both sides having good arguments).

June 2001: The Barefoot cover-up: Out of the blue, Gretchen Fathauer and I receive an anonymous email letter that was supposedly sent by Jaime Jackson to vet boards and authorities in each of the 4 states that Dr. Strasser would be visiting for her July 2001 seminars. We then received confirmation that the letter was indeed written by Jackson. This was shocking to us at the time, because we had no idea that he was so violently opposed to Dr. Strasser. These letters made his position clear; he was asking that Dr. Strasser be arrested for practicing veterinary medicine without a license in those states. This had now become extremely political. For the good of the barefoot movement, Gretchen and I made the deliberate decision to keep the letter hidden. We let the illu-

sion continue on that Strasser and Jackson were working together. (Vet board representatives did come to one of the seminars and found no violation of any laws.)

July 2001: Strasser's second seminar tour takes place in North America. Dr. Robert Bowker was an attendee of her Canadian seminar; I travelled to Florida to attend one, where I met Dr. Strasser for the very first time. Strasser continued over the years to give her seminars in North America and around the world (United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia), and to teach her Hoofcare Specialist Certification Course.

October 2001: Publication of the hardcover 800 page textbook *The Hoofcare Specialist's Handbook, Hoof Orthopedics and Holistic Lameness Rehabilitation* by Hiltrud Strasser, DVM & Sabine Kells.

2001: Dr. Strasser forms a partnership with her 2001 course graduate Todd Merrell and his company Zen Equine to operate Strasser Hoofcare for North America. He was authorized to give Strasser Hoofcare Seminars, and began organizing the NA course, with Sabine Kells as course instructor. Soon the Strasser Certification title is changed to "SHP" for Strasser Hoofcare Professional.

2001: Farrier KC La Pierre publishes his paper, "The Suspension Theory of Hoof Dynamics." He also released a DVD about his own barefoot system. In this paper, he gives credit to Jaime Jackson, Dr. Strasser, and Dr. Robert Bowker.

2001: Jaime Jackson's book *Founder: Prevention & Cure the Natural Way* is published.

2002: Martha Olivo creates the organization United Horsemanship. Expanding from her weekend trimming clinics and modifying what she had learned from Dr. Strasser, she began to provide certification for her students after they completed a week-long course. They are given the unique titles of "hoof groom" and "mentor hoof groom." Supposedly the focus was to teach horse owners how to trim their OWN horses, but hoof grooms soon began to compete professionally with Strasser-trained SHP's—who had taken a very expensive one year course (with a veterinarian!), as opposed to a one week course.

May 2002: Tufts University's School of Veterinary Medicine hosts "Hoofcare for the New Millennium: Exploring the Strasser Method." A panel of veterinarians and farriers discussed and evaluated information presented by Dr. Strasser. Pete Ramey was sent to the Conference to represent Jaime Jackson's wild horse trim method (this was the first time he met Dr. Strasser). Since much of the Conference was taken up with discussion by panelists, they only saw her trim one single hoof. It was also far too early at that time to present any "proof" of barefoot to a skeptical audience of vets and farriers. This conference was, however, a milestone—after this, every other barefoot method attempted

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to vastly distance itself from Strasser, often by violently criticizing what she (and her hoofcare specialists) did. Because of this, I believe everyone lost sight of the significant contributions Strasser made to the body of knowledge which became our barefoot movement.

2002: Jaime Jackson, who had been publicly fairly quiet since the seminar letter to the vet boards, publishes his 2nd edition of *Horse Owners Guide to Natural Hoof Care*. The book was completely revised, and all references to or mention of Dr. Strasser were removed. It was after this point, when it was publicly clear that Jackson was no longer associated with Strasser, that barefoot began to separate distinctly into two separate camps: Strasser barefooters, or Jackson barefooters, and things often turned quite ugly on forums and the rumor mill. This rift within the barefoot world, that Gretchen & I had tried so hard to avoid, simply added more fuel to the fire for those who were violently opposed to barefoot. (This rift even continues to this day, because students of various groups are often not taught the full spectrum; many Jackson-oriented trimmers will omit the existence of Strasser from barefoot history, and many Strasser-oriented trimmers will neglect to give due credit to Jackson. This is not helpful to anyone, least of all to the horses, who benefit from our FULL knowledge.)

2001-2002: The American Association of Natural Hoof Care Practitioners (AANHCP) was quietly formed by Jaime Jackson in 2001. The 2002 Annual Convention included Pete Ramey, Steve Dick, Jaime Jackson, Ruth Green, Charles Hall, Cindy Sullivan and Richard Drewry. The AANHCP's Natural Hoof Care practitioner certification program began, and Pete Ramey became just one of the clinicians to offer the enrollment clinic for the course.

February 2003: Dr. Robert Bowker, who had been quietly doing extensive hoof research in his lab at Michigan State University, suddenly comes to barefoot attention after his assistant writes up some of his information in a paper entitled, "Physiological Trimming for Healthy Equine Foot," which was posted this month.

2003: Pete Ramey's book *Making Natural Hoof Care Work for You* is published by Jaime Jackson's company, Star Ridge Publishing.

2003: Publication of Dr. Hiltrud Strasser's book, *Who's Afraid of Founder? Laminitis Demystified: Causes, Prevention, and Holistic Rehabilitation*.

November 2003: "2003 International Conference for Strasser Hoofcare," the first Strasser World Conference is held in Tuebingen, Germany. About 200 people attended from around the world. (It was after attending this conference that James & I realized how vastly different his trimming techniques had become, and that we had to leave their group and forge our own path.)



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Pete Ramey with Yvonne & James Welz during the January 2007 EasyCare sponsored Ramey and Bowker Clinics in Tucson, Arizona.

December 2003: I edit and publish the book, *Barefoot Stories featuring the Strasser Method of Barefoot Horse Care*.

2004: The Strasser Method is getting a lot of media attention, but mostly just controversial, and often very negative. A reputation had developed for this method "laming horses." For example, it was a hot topic at the 2003 American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) Convention. A five page article "Controversy Afoot—Shod vs. Strasser Method" was published in May 2004 issue of the very mainstream publication, *Horse Illustrated*.

2004: KC La Pierre publishes his book, *The Chosen Road*. The concepts are very compatible and similar to those endorsed by Strasser and Jackson. He later created the "Institute of Applied Equine Podiatry" with a full "Equine Podiatrist" certification course and educational programs offered in the US and the UK.

November 2005: The second Strasser World Conference in Tuebingen, Germany. James & I did NOT attend this event, and though we had been trying to politely leave their group for a long time, this is when it finally became clear to Dr. Strasser that we were operating independently.

2005: Cindy Sullivan, along with Steve Dick and Derry McCormick, all formerly part of the AANHCP, start up the Equine Sciences Academy. A professional natural hoofcare educational course is offered, with certification.

Late 2005-2006: General barefoot articles are published in mainstream horse publications featuring Pete Ramey, whose approach was much more appreciated by the general public. This included *Practical Horseman Magazine*, December 2005, and *Horse & Rider Magazine*, February 2006 (which included warnings against the extreme Strasser Method). Pete was also featured on Clinton Anderson's TV show. Meanwhile, the Strasser method received another blow with the 2005 publication of Dr. Robert Miller's popular book *The Revolution in Horsemanship*, which described "aggressive and bloody" trimming.

2006: Strasser's public image is not helped with the United Kingdom sentencing of a Strasser-trained hoof trimmer, found guilty of causing suf-

fering to her foundered pony. (From our point of view, this appeared to be politics to attack barefoot.) This was appealed, and her sentence was reduced to community service. There were other UK lawsuits involving trimmers trained by Strasser, which left quite the public relations problem—but also appeared politically-motivated.

2006: Pete Ramey leaves the AANHCP, and separates from Jaime Jackson. By this time, Pete had been the main clinician to provide the highly popular AANHCP orientation clinics for their certification program for several years. These clinics had grown extremely popular. Pete was, by that time, promoting a different trim than Jackson's trim, and so the two parted ways. Later, there was an official announcement made that everyone certified by the AANHCP would have to return for a recertification program to clarify that the correct trim was being practiced. At this point, many professionals and students left the AANHCP group, following Pete Ramey instead.

2006: The Oregon School of Natural Hoof Care is started up by Cheryl Henderson who was initially trained by Martha Olivo. The school offers a certification after completion of week-long courses.

August 2006: The American Hoof Association (AHA) is organized by Pete Ramey. This group does not provide actual training, but a review board critiques applicants and supplies them with a certification.

September 2006: Claudia Garner and Todd Merrell had been developing an online hoofcare course for the Strasser organization, but Todd was let go after the Sept. 2006 Strasser World Conference. A new N.A. Strasser organization was created: Equine Soundness Assoc. (ESA), with a board headed by Steve Skinner, DVM (later changed to ESANA, Equine Soundness Assoc. of N.A., which gained non-profit status in 2012).

2006: Jaime Jackson publishes his books: *Paddock Paradise, A Guide to Natural Horse Boarding* and *AANHCP Official Trimming Guidelines*.

January 2007: This is the first of multiple Dr. Robert Bowker clinics that James & I attend. Dr. Bowker had just begun giving his own presentations in conjunction with Pete Ramey's extremely popular clinics. It was Pete who convinced Dr. Bowker that there was a barefoot audience out there who would appreciate Bowker's controversial studies—which all seemed to point to shoes being harmful to the health of the hoof.

April 2007: The first AANHCP Cluster Clinic is held in Warrenton, Missouri. These clinics, which included orientation clinics for the AANHCP certification program, replaced the previous orientation clinics given by Pete Ramey. (These clinics would eventually become the Liberated Horsemanship events.)

September 2007: Pete Ramey releases his 10 disc video set, "Under the Horse." Many horse owners learned to trim using this DVD set alone.

February 2008: AANHCP Conference in Reno, Nevada, which was the first one ever open for attendance to the general public. This was also the first time Jaime Jackson had visited wild mustang hooves since his initial studies in the 1980's, with a trip to the Palomino Valley BLM corrals, where attendees saw mustang hooves up close. Jackson revamps the AANHCP with a new name of "Association for the Advancement of Natural Horse Care Practices."

March 2008: Pacific Hoof Care Practitioners is founded and becomes a hoof care provider educational program. The founders were members of the AANHCP and/or Pete Ramey's American Hoof Association. Originally just for local members near California, the organization has expanded to include all who are interested.

April 2008: Joe Camp's book, *The Soul of a Horse, Life Lessons from the Herd*, is published. This inspirational book, which goes on to become a national best-seller, brings the concepts of barefoot horse care to a very wide, general audience. What is notable is that Joe Camp gives full credit to Strasser & Jackson for the barefoot movement.

2008: Claudia Garner creates the company Equine Soundness Inc., along with several other former Strasser professionals. Equine Soundness Inc. combines an online course with hands-on training to offer a professional certification.

February 2009: The AANHCP Official Orientation Clinics set for April 2009 (hosted by



James & Yvonne Welz with Dr. Robert Bowker in November 2007.

Liberated Horsemanship) are postponed. Soon after, Jaime Jackson creates a new and separate training organization, Institute for the Study of Natural Horse Care Practices (ISNHCP).

2009: Liberated Horsemanship, formerly part of the AANHCP, becomes a separate hoofcare educational program under the direction of Dr. Bruce Nock. The group provides hoofcare certification based on attending a series of their clinics, along with further field instruction.

May 2011: Brian Hampson of the University of Queensland, Australia, published his thesis "The effects of environment on the feral horse foot," which becomes the basis for numerous published articles in journals around the world. The controversial conclusions of this study were interpreted by some as an attack against the wild horse model of trimming.

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Summer 2011: *The Horse's Hoof Magazine* expands, beginning with Issue 43 (Summer 2011), to 32 full color pages. Printing costs are now largely subsidized by advertisers.

October 2011: James & Yvonne Welz launch Hoof Help Online, a membership educational website where they teach their own unique system of trimming.

November 2011: Pete Ramey releases his book, *Care and Rehabilitation of the Equine Foot*. This massive book includes chapters by Dr. Robert Bowker, Dr. Hilary Clayton, Dr. Debra Taylor, and many other experts.

January 2013: The International Bare Hoof Association, a worldwide membership organization for all barefoot enthusiasts from every background, is founded. Their aim is to become the equivalent of the "American Farriers Association" for the barefoot community.

This is NOT a complete history by any means, but just some of the more important points along the way of this past 15 years of the Barefoot Movement. Most of the information provided here has full documentation. Also, many details of dates and events have been printed over the years in *The Horse's Hoof Magazine*. I hope that after reading this document, you now realize just how **newly developed** the barefoot movement really is. And how we are ALL responsible for making history, at this very moment! 🐾

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